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LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

VOLUME XIX

THOMAS DE QUINCEY'S THEORY
OF LITERATURE

THOMAS DE QUINCEY'S THEORY OF LITERATURE

By SIGMUND K. PROCTOR



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Foreword

THE author of this monograph, Sigmund Kluss Proctor, was born in Sturgis, Michigan, on January 4, 1903, and died on August 18, 1938. As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan his special interests were astronomy, philosophy, and the modern languages and literatures, and he graduated with "High Distinction" in 1923. From 1925 until his untimely death he was instructor in Rhetoric and English at the University of Michigan, except for temporary appointments of a year each at Ohio State University and the University of Illinois.

His study of De Quincey was presented as his doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan in 1937. He proposed some revision of parts of it before publication, but left this work incomplete, and it has been carried on, so far as possible in accordance with what was known to be Dr. Proctor's plans, by Professors C. D. Thorpe and Paul Mueschke. However, there doubtless remain passages which Dr. Proctor would have improved, but which no one else could rewrite with any felicity; it has been thought best to let them stand as he phrased them. And no attempt has been made to bring the text of the book up to date with discussions of more recent scholarship on De Quincey; instead, Professor Thorpe has provided such a supplementary survey in an appendix. The integrity of Dr. Proctor's own contribution is thus preserved inviolate, though supplemented and completed by the labor of his friend and colleague.

LOUIS I. BREDVOLD

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OF LITERATURE

NOTE

Unless otherwise stated, citations of the writings of De Quincey refer to *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, 14 vols., edited by David Masson (Edinburgh, 1889-90). Where mentioned in the text, this edition of the works appears simply as *Collected Writings*.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

I

NO SYSTEMATIC and detailed study of De Quincey's critical writings and of the literary theory embodied in them has ever been made. The main reasons for this neglect are not difficult to formulate. De Quincey's reputation as a critic, never too secure, has shrunk, along with his more general literary reputation. Even the encomiums on his work by commentators of the generation following his own were largely offset by derogation of his mentality and judgment by such influential writers as Stirling and Stephen.¹ And modern opinion has been fairly well expressed by Herford's disparaging statement that De Quincey's "critical essays abound with various learning, but are more remarkable for incidental felicities of expression than for penetrating criticism."² Probably no one today would agree with Masson's incautious dictum that "De Quincey was *facile princeps*, to the extent of his touch, among the English critics of his generation."³

De Quincey's criticism—particularly his philosophical criticism—consists largely of scattered fragments, which it is not an easy task to correlate. Some of these fragments are excursive passages in essays dedicated primarily to other

¹ James Hutchison Stirling, "De Quincey and Coleridge upon Kant," in *Jerrold, Tennyson and Macaulay, with Other Critical Essays* (Edinburgh, 1868), pp. 172-224; Leslie Stephen, "De Quincey," *The Fortnightly Review*, IX (N. S.) (1871), 310-329.

² C. H. Herford, *The Age of Wordsworth* (London, 1897), p. 71.

³ David Masson, *Thomas De Quincey* (New York, 1882), p. 180.

subjects; the remainder represent what is left of the professedly critical essays when the chaff of his digressions and elaborations of purely incidental ideas is removed. For J. H. Fowler is all too well justified in his complaint that more than once De Quincey "projects an ambitious critical dissertation which begins in a lofty vein, 'Ercles' vein', only to spread itself into an arid waste of talk where the argument is finally lost altogether. . . ."⁴

More discouraging than De Quincey's incompleteness and discursiveness is his frequent downright inconsistency, even within the limits of a single context. Arthur Symonds goes so far as to declare, "De Quincey . . . has no fixed mind underneath the swaying surface of his digressions."⁵ Quite as likely to deter the would-be student of his theory is the unquestioned badness of some of De Quincey's critical judgments, which are of such a nature as to suggest a rather unsound basic equipment. Even his apologists must admit that De Quincey's unfavorable criticism of particular literatures or periods or authors shows much blindness, prejudice, and perversity. Thus his "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature" has for its implicit thesis the idea that Greek literature fell so far short of realizing the capacities of the language that for the purposes of the general reader Greek is not worth learning. His criticism of the literature of the eighteenth century betrays a lack of sympathetic understanding. His essay on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is a museum piece of bad-tempered and morally narrow denunciation.

Finally, there has been a disposition to regard De Quincey's criticism as hardly in need of extended investigation. His interpreters have tended to dismiss his leading ideas and doctrines in two different ways. Certain of those ideas—most notably his famous distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power and his equally famous definition of style as the incarnation of

⁴ "De Quincey as Literary Critic," *The English Association Pamphlets*, No. 52 (London, 1922), p. 4.

⁵ *Studies in Prose and Verse* (London, 1904), p. 47.

thought—these critics have commonly assumed to be sufficiently clear both in themselves and in their relation to the thought of De Quincey's age not to demand special study. Certain other ideas—particularly his ideas about rhetoric—they have tended to view either as too eccentric or as too baffling to repay careful investigation.

The present study was undertaken in the first place simply out of a desire to define and integrate the various elements of De Quincey's theory of literature as that theory is embodied in his pronouncements on art, on literature itself, on style, and on rhetoric. It was felt that the difficulties attending such an attempt, while very real, were not insuperable—that despite the disorder and the contradictions in De Quincey's thought a fairly coherent statement of his aesthetic could be constructed, a statement in which the inconsistencies would themselves fall into a pattern. And it was felt that De Quincey is of sufficient importance in the history of criticism, however low his fortunes may have fallen as judged by the utterances of certain of his critics, to justify such an investigation of his thought. It was hoped, moreover, that the investigation might assist in the establishment, not necessarily of a higher estimate of his position as a critic—for in the view of the present writer the general balance of current opinion is not unfair to De Quincey—but of a more settled opinion as to the particular merits, such as they are, of his critical contribution. There is far from perfect agreement on these merits, as will be shown. Quite apart, however, from any question of evaluation, the investigation was felt to be worth while as a study of an extraordinarily interesting and paradoxical mind, which combines most of the characteristic traits of the impressionistic temperament with a fine power of purely intellectual analysis.

This initial intention simply to execute a more searching study of De Quincey's thought than had ever been undertaken was reënforced, as the investigation got under way, by an increasing awareness of the inadequacy and inaccuracy of existing interpretations of his philosophy of literature.

Merely cursory comment on De Quincey's criticism

abounds, but a bibliography of special treatments of it could include no more than four titles. These studies are of essay length only and purport to do nothing more than discuss isolated aspects of his thought or summarize the writer's general interpretations. Most comprehensive of the four treatments is Miss Darbishire's introduction to her selected edition of De Quincey's critical writings (1909). Miss Darbishire acutely remarks that De Quincey's genius "moved upon an orbit of its own; and he seems as an author to call imperatively for that kind of criticism which Carlyle so warmly advocates. We need to know his merits before we pronounce upon his faults."⁶ The merit of his critical work, she feels, is that it gives "a fuller revelation of his many-sided genius than his more purely imaginative writings, and [that] it has a high intrinsic value in its sincerity, its subtlety, and, to use a word which De Quincey himself applied to the highest function of literature, its *power*."⁷ It is indeed precisely as a literature of power that she values his critical work.

Because De Quincey's criticism is "as much human and individual, as little systematic and formal as his imaginative writing . . . we can no better dispense with a knowledge of his personality, of his mental and moral growth, in the one case than in the other."⁸ Miss Darbishire accordingly sketches the sources of certain of De Quincey's ideas and habits of thought: in his youthful experiences, in his dreams, in his addiction to opium, and in the influence of other thinkers, notably Wordsworth and Coleridge. Her summarizing statement about this last influence merits quotation:

. . . Two thinkers and writers, and two only of all whom he came across in his wide intercourse with men and his wide experience of books, had a profound influence upon his critical work. Wordsworth and Coleridge, first through the *Lyrical Ballads*, and afterwards through personal intercourse, had everything to do with shaping his conceptions of literature and the arts. . . . The characteristic products of German philosophy in the sphere of literary criticism, such as the principle of

⁶ *De Quincey's Literary Criticism*, edited by H. Darbishire (London, 1909), Introduction, p. 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

likeness in unlikeness, of the union of opposites, the conception of art as the fulfilment of Nature, were first familiarized in England by Coleridge. All these became a part of De Quincey's theory of literature, and as he despised the German critics and revered Coleridge, it is safe to assume that his debt is here to the latter, rather than to the former.⁹

Miss Darbishire proceeds with a brief characterization of De Quincey's position in criticism, which she takes to be entirely romantic:

His dictum that "the object of the fine arts is not pleasure, but the sense of power and the illimitable incarnated as it were in pleasure," marks his romantic standpoint in criticism. In his sense of the all-importance of internal meaning and the comparative unimportance of external form he is a Romantic of the Romantics.¹⁰

Indeed De Quincey is made out to be a typical romantic in every way. "Pre-eminently he is to be regarded as critic and creator of romantic art."¹¹ But

. . . he is saved from the worst faults of romantic criticism by the twofold constitution of his mind. He was by nature, by habit, and by intellectual training, a metaphysician as well as an artist, and his interest in the philosophical basis of literature gives his criticism an intellectual value, which can be appreciated quite apart from its imaginative or emotional quality.

His definitions of such things as rhetoric, style, the *sublime* in art, often show a fine intellectual subtlety, and they are always stimulating to thought. If they are sometimes one-sided and not permanently satisfactory, they will yet be found in almost every case to have their roots in the truth.

His reflections upon the theory of literature are penetrating and suggestive. Their value is apt to be overlooked because they often rest upon ideas which in our day have become commonplaces. . . . He is the first of English critics to support consistently, both in precept and in practice, the theory that in literature as in all the arts, substance and form are inseparable.¹²

This is in many respects a discerning analysis, but apart from the limitation that it is merely a summary of conclusions and presents next to no evidence, its defect is that it oversimplifies De Quincey's thought. De Quincey does not

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

adhere consistently to the theory that the object of the fine arts is power, nor does he always view substance and form as inseparable. In the "Rhetoric" he specifically names pleasure itself as the general end of the fine arts, and in the essay "Language" he declares style to be a fine art in itself, capable of being valued apart from the interest of the subject matter. There is indeed a persistent cleavage in his thought on the function of art and on the relations of form and matter, a cleavage unrecognized by himself and also, it would appear, by his interpreters. It will be the most important specific objective of the present study to explore this fundamental duality in his position.

Miss Darbishire's analysis is an illustration of the common tendency to dispose of the most prominent aspects of De Quincey's thought by a facile description of them as characteristically romantic, and to ignore the other aspects. The romantic side itself merits detailed study—De Quincey's concept of the nature of power requires minute examination in the light of his general philosophical beliefs. And the other side—best represented by the "Rhetoric"—is by no means to be dismissed with the mere statement that it shows intellectual subtlety. In the opinion of the present writer it is De Quincey's theory of rhetoric that affords the best key to an understanding of the characteristics of his criticism generally and of the central contradictions in it.

According to Miss Darbishire, it is as a theoretical critic that De Quincey is most important. Fowler (writing in 1922), on the other hand, dismisses his theoretical criticism with the remark quoted above and with an attack on the value of the famous distinction between the literature of knowledge and that of power: "... the distinction drawn by De Quincey seems to me not only irrelevant but positively harmful."¹³ It is as an appreciative critic of English authors that Fowler values De Quincey. He thinks that in this respect De Quincey has not before received his due, and he enumerates six services that he performed in the criticism of English literature, to which he contributed: (1) a new kind

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

of criticism of Shakespeare ("On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*"), (2) a prompt appreciation of the genius of Wordsworth, (3) an early recognition of Landor, (4) an appraisal of Milton more just than that of any critic who preceded him, except possibly Cowper, (5) "full and notable" critical justice to Sir Thomas Browne and Jeremy Taylor, (6) judicious praise of Burke. This point of view is certainly not the usual one. The present writer feels that Fowler's essay is a timely and suggestive reminder of the high lights of De Quincey's appreciative criticism, but that Fowler exhibits a strange blindness to the merits of his general thought on literature. Fowler's criticism of the knowledge-power antithesis will be discussed in Chapter IV.

The third of the four special studies referred to is Professor Hudson's essay, "De Quincey on Rhetoric and Public Speaking" (1925). It is the only published study that gives any detailed consideration to De Quincey's ideas on rhetoric. It is penetrating in its analysis and richly suggestive, but it does not pretend to be exhaustive or to relate De Quincey's view of rhetoric to his general theory of literature.

Professor Hudson states that the original purpose of his study was to ascertain De Quincey's concepts of rhetoric, eloquence, and style, and the interrelation of these, but that this ambitious attempt was abandoned in favor of simply choosing "from the teeming mass of De Quincey's ideas a few which appear specially significant, considered in relation to rhetorical tradition and recent stylistic practice; and illustrations from our author's own practice of the salient points of his theory."¹⁴ The essay is chiefly valuable for two things: it suggests that De Quincey's concept of rhetorical invention was largely determined by his love of intellectual and fantastic play with any subject, and it shows that in such writings as his book reviews and literary essays De Quincey has furnished models, if we can bring ourselves to forget his digressiveness and the related defects, of what he defined as

¹⁴ Hoyt Hopewell Hudson, "De Quincey on Rhetoric and Public Speaking," in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans* (New York, 1925), pp. 134-135.

rhetoric. These are important ideas, and will be developed to form an essential element in the present interpretation.

The fourth study is Miss Powell's chapter on De Quincey in her volume *The Romantic Theory of Poetry*. It is a highly suggestive, though poorly ordered, discussion of De Quincey's mind, his art, and his aesthetic, written from the point of view of an adherent of the Crocean aesthetic. In general it may be said that it suffers from the same limitations and defects as Miss Darbishire's essay. Miss Powell remarks with insight that it "is nearer the truth to say that he [De Quincey] was a man of many abilities, bent in a particular direction by a romantic creed," than to say that he is simply a conspicuous example of "a romantic temperament."¹⁵ Unfortunately she fails to follow through the implications of this statement. The essay on "Rhetoric" is not discussed. De Quincey's definition of style as the incarnation of thought, though interpreted accurately as to its scope, is misinterpreted to mean that style is "the expression of individuality."¹⁶ No recognition is shown of the conflict in De Quincey's thought between the rival ideas of pleasure and power.

II

The principal documents of De Quincey's criticism have been brought together by Masson in Volumes X and XI of his edition of the *Collected Writings*,¹⁷ under the label "Literary Theory and Criticism," but they by no means include all of De Quincey's essential utterances on critical subjects. Furthermore, this loose collection of the professedly critical essays of a writer notable for discursiveness and caprice does not, apart from the issue of completeness, in any way constitute a satisfactorily systematized corpus of criticism which the student can proceed simply to survey.

For these reasons, and because an examination of De

¹⁵ A. E. Powell, *The Romantic Theory of Poetry: An Examination in the Light of Croce's Aesthetic* (London, 1926). p. 162.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁷ *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by David Masson (Edinburgh, 1889-90) (hereafter referred to as *Collected Writings*).

Quincey's general philosophical background was deemed essential to an understanding of his critical position, the method pursued in the preparation of this study has been to extract from the entire body of De Quincey's writings the critical and philosophical *loci*—some of them mere sentences and footnotes—to classify all this material, and finally to attempt a systematic survey and interpretation of the main divisions of his theory. Since trial studies of sequences of his critical utterances led to no indication of a development in his thought, and since certain parts of his theory have to be built up from bare fragments widely separated in time, chronology has been largely disregarded in the presentation.

The study is based on the fourteen volumes of the Masson edition of the *Collected Writings*, on Japp's two-volume collection of *Posthumous Works*,¹⁸ on the small number of pieces in the *Uncollected Writings*¹⁹ edited by Hogg which are not included in Masson (these, however, contain nothing of importance to the student of De Quincey's criticism), and on such letters of De Quincey's as are contained in Japp's *Thomas De Quincey: His Life and Writings*.²⁰ Since De Quincey has been carefully collected and edited, this body of material may be taken to represent essentially all the writing that he completed, with the exception of unpublished letters.²¹ The poverty in critical comment of the published letters gives reason to presume that whatever unpublished correspondence is in existence contains little if anything that could add to our knowledge of De Quincey as critic.²²

It may be useful to list here the individual works in

¹⁸ *The Posthumous Works of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by Alexander H. Japp (London, 1891-93) (hereafter referred to as *Posthumous Works*).

¹⁹ *The Uncollected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by James Hogg (2d ed.; London and New York, 1892).

²⁰ New York, 1877.

²¹ And with the exception of those items in Masson's "Register of Unincluded Items" (*Collected Writings*, XIV, 386-388) which are not found in Japp or Hogg. None of these has any apparent relation to criticism.

²² The presumption is supported by an examination of the letters recently published in Willard H. Bonner's *De Quincey at Work: As Seen in One Hundred Thirty New and Newly Edited Letters* (Buffalo, 1936).

which the bulk of De Quincey's critical comment is to be found. Of these, the volumes of the *Collected Writings* contain:

- I: "De Quincey's General Preface of 1853"; "Autobiography (1785-1803)" (chiefly Chapters II, IV, VIII).
- II: "Autobiography (1803-1808)" (Chapter I); "Literary and Lake Reminiscences" (chiefly Chapters I-V).
- III: "London Reminiscences" (Chapters I-II, VII).
- IV: "Shakspeare"; "Life of Milton," with "Postscript Respecting Johnson's Life of Milton"; "Oliver Goldsmith"; "Goethe"; "Schiller."
- V: "Charles Lamb."
- VI: "Homer and the Homeridae"; "Philosophy of Herodotus."
- X: "Letters to a Young Man"; "Rhetoric"; "Style"; "Language"; "Conversation"; "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature"; "Theory of Greek Tragedy"; "The *Antigone* of Sophocles"; "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*"; "On Milton"; "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater"; "Antagonism," "False Distinctions."
- XI: "Schlosser's Literary History of the Eighteenth Century"; "The Poetry of Pope"; "Lord Carlisle on Pope"; "Lessing"; footnotes to Lessing's *Laocoon*; "Goethe as Reflected in His Novel of *Wilhelm Meister*"; "John Paul Frederick Richter"; "On Wordsworth's Poetry"; "Notes on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits*"; "Notes on Walter Savage Landor"; "Milton versus Southey and Landor."
- XIV: "The English Language."

In addition, "Some Thoughts on Biography, Brevia—Literary," in Volume I of the *Posthumous Works*, should be mentioned.

It will be observed that most of these writings group themselves into four divisions: material from De Quincey's "Autobiography" and "Reminiscences" (*Collected Writings*, Vols. I-III), material from biographical essays (*ibid.*, Vols. IV-V), essays in literary theory (*ibid.*, Vols. X, XIV), and essays in applied criticism (*ibid.*, Vol. XI).

The text of all items in Volumes X and XI of Masson's edition has been compared with the original text as it appeared in magazine articles. Except for certain omissions, where De Quincey seems to have changed his mind, as in the notorious article on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the

alterations and additions discovered were negligible. Since Masson is careful to give the text of De Quincey in its latest form, it is evident that De Quincey retouched his critical pieces but little when, beginning in 1853, he prepared them for inclusion in the first English edition of his collected works.

CHAPTER II

Philosophical Background

I. DE QUINCEY AS A STUDENT OF PHILOSOPHY

DESPITE his interest in the precise analysis of ideas and despite the fact that he was a habitual student of philosophy, De Quincey was no philosopher. His theory of literature is based, not on a metaphysics in the strict sense of the word, but upon certain *felt* convictions. It is the object of this chapter to present the evidence for these propositions.

It is a fair statement that De Quincey began his intellectual life as a student of philosophy, and of German philosophy in particular. His acquaintance with German literature began in 1802, when he was seventeen, during that curious episode of his vagabondage through Wales which followed his secret departure from the Manchester Grammar School;¹ and his serious study of philosophy began three years later, at Oxford, when he plunged into the works of Kant, whose transcendental philosophy, he tells us, had seemed to him the very tree of knowledge in the Eden of German literature.²

... For two or three years before I mastered the language of Kant, it [the transcendental philosophy] had been a pole-star to my hopes, and *in hypothesis*, agreeably to the uncertain plans of uncertain knowledge, the luminous guide to my future life—as a life dedicated and set apart to philosophy.³

... Had the transcendental philosophy corresponded to my expectations, and had it left important openings for further pursuit, my

¹ "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater," III, 333.

² "Autobiography," II, 85-86.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

purpose then was to have retired, after a few years spent in Oxford, to the woods of Lower Canada. I had even marked out the situation for a cottage and a considerable library, about seventeen miles from Quebec.⁴

Such are his own statements, after thirty years, of the place which philosophy had occupied in his youthful mind.

But the critical philosophy disappointed him:

. . . Alas! all was a dream. Six weeks' study was sufficient to close my hopes in that quarter for ever. The philosophy of Kant—so famous, so commanding in Germany from about the period of the French Revolution—already, in 1805, I had found to be a philosophy of destruction, and scarcely in any one chapter so much as *tending* to a philosophy of reconstruction. It destroys by wholesale, and it substitutes nothing.⁵

He did not, however, abandon the study of philosophy, but for a period of seven years read extensively—in Kant himself, in Fichte and Schelling, and in the metaphysics of the Schoolmen.⁶

Then occurred a period of such intellectual debility, resulting from his subservience to opium, as made philosophy intolerable; but in 1816 he returned to the study of Kant and other philosophical writers.⁷ At this time he had some five thousand books in his library. In one of the finest passages in the "Confessions" he sketches the circumstances of his daily life in the winter of 1816–17, and pictures himself in his cottage at Grasmere with his decanter of ruby-colored laudanum: "that, and a book of German metaphysics placed by its side, will sufficiently attest my being in the neighborhood."⁸

Again there came an interval in which application was impossible: "For nearly two years I believe that I read nothing and studied nothing."⁹ The one book which he did study during this period was Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. It was in 1818 that a friend sent it down from Edinburgh. In a variant passage, omitted from the

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108. His reasons for such retirement, he proceeds to explain, would have been the profound solitude and the exalting effect of "an under-consciousness of forests endless and silent."

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86. The reasons why De Quincey found Kant disappointing and "destructive" will be analyzed in section III of this chapter (see pp. 28 ff.).

⁶ "Confessions," III, 397.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

final form of the "Confessions" but supplied as a fragment by Japp in the *Posthumous Works*, De Quincey names some of the philosophers whose works, during this period of intense melancholia, he took perverse pleasure in helping his young son shoot down with bow and arrow from the stacks in which they were piled:

. . . We build up a pile, having for its base some slender modern metaphysician, ill able (poor man!) to sustain such a weight of philosophy. Upon this we place the Dutch quartos of Descartes and Spinoza; then a third story of Schoolmen in folio—the master of Sentences, Suarez, Picus Mirandula, and the Telemonian bulk of Thomas Aquinas; and when the whole architecture seems firm and compact, we finish our system of metaphysics by roofing the whole with Duval's enormous Aristotle.¹⁰

Until about the age of thirty-five, when he began his career as a man of letters by writing the "Confessions," De Quincey is to be regarded as a professional student—equally of philosophy and of literature. After that time he carried on philosophical studies at least intermittently. In his "Reminiscences of Coleridge" he speaks of "having read for thirty years in the same track as Coleridge—that track in which few of any age will ever follow us, such as German metaphysicians, Latin schoolmen, thaumaturgic Platonists, religious Mystics."¹¹

From so extensive a preoccupation with philosophy we might expect substantial results, if not in the form of original speculation, then at least in that of interpretation and synthesis; and our expectation might be heightened by our knowledge of his gift for acute analysis and of that other gift which he describes as "a logical instinct for feeling in a moment the secret analogies or parallelisms that connected things else apparently remote."¹² We have seen that in early youth he regarded his life as one "dedicated and set apart to philosophy." His disappointment in Kant did not alter this conscious intention. In writing of the period of dejection

¹⁰ *The Posthumous Works of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by Alexander H. Japp (London, 1891-93) (hereafter referred to as *Posthumous Works*), I, 318.

¹¹ II, 147.

¹² "Confessions," III, 332.

in which he was able to study nothing except Ricardo, he refers to an enormous treatise that he had projected and that was then "lying locked up as by frost": ". . . I had devoted the labour of my whole life, had dedicated my intellect, blossoms and fruits, to the slow and elaborate toil of constructing one single work, to which I had presumed to give the title of an unfinished work of Spinoza's—viz. '*De Emendatione Humani Intellectûs*.'"¹³ It is not clear whether the toil he mentions had reached the stage of composition.

At any rate, nothing came of that scheme or of any other of the sort. De Quincey has left us not so much as one essay of original speculation. Doubtless the same reasons apply that have been offered as an explanation of his failure to achieve in the field of criticism more than a small part of what his endowments suggest to have been within his capacity—the discursive habit of his mind, the influence of opium, the circumstances attendant upon his writing for periodical publication. But there is a special reason of prime importance: he never recovered from the blight of his philosophical aspirations caused by his disappointment in Kant. The implications of this statement can be appreciated only after his relation to Kant has been analyzed in some detail.

As an interpreter and popularizer of philosophical thought De Quincey failed only less signally than as a philosopher in his own right. It is true that in his day he had a reputation as an authority on German philosophy, but that fact is explained by the slowness with which knowledge of Kant passed from the Continent to England. Doubtless De Quincey advanced such knowledge, but he did so more by keeping Kant's name before the public than by any adequate exposition of his philosophy. Indeed, with the exception of one chapter in the "Autobiography,"¹⁴ which Masson entitles "German Studies and Kant in Particular," his writings do not contain even the most sketchy elucidation of Kant's main ideas. In this single chapter he does outline,

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

¹⁴ II, 81–109.

in such fashion as to demonstrate a considerable talent for popular presentation of abstruse thought, the principal concepts of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. His other writings on Kant are translations of minor or miscellaneous works, or gossip accounts of Kant the man, or animadversions on the existing commentaries on his works.¹⁵ To no other philosopher except Plato does he devote the special consideration implied by a separate essay, and the paper on Plato (in form a review of the first five books of the *Republic*) is but a sustained expression of his passionate dislike of that great mind.

II. DE QUINCEY IN RELATION TO PRE-KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY

The story of De Quincey's relation to philosophy is chiefly that of his relation to Kant and the German romantic philosophers, but a survey of his attitude toward such of the thinkers before Kant as he comments upon will have a double value: it will assist in the interpretation of his connections with Kantian and post-Kantian speculation, and it will indicate relationships (both positive and negative) about which questions might arise in later chapters.

One might, on first thought, suppose that De Quincey would have found much in the philosophy of Plato that was congenial to his mind. Masson, alluding to the Coleridgean maxim that every man is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian, asserts that "if any man ever had the Platonic thumb, or whatever else is the true physiological indication, it was surely De Quincey."¹⁶ He is probably thinking of the

¹⁵ In "Kant in His Miscellaneous Essays" De Quincey states that he abstains from every part of Kant's works which belongs to him in his capacity of founder of a new philosophy. He gives this reason: "The best way to a presumptive or analogical appreciation of a man's pretensions in matters which we do not well understand is to try him in those which we *do*. Metaphysics are pretty generally out of the reach of a nation made up of practical men of business. To judge a metaphysician directly is therefore out of our province . . ." (VIII, 90).

¹⁶ Editor's Preface, *Collected Writings*, VIII, 3.

† mystical tendency of De Quincey's mind and of the moral
 † idealism of his nature. But, Masson continues,

. . . [De Quincey's] attitude to the world's master-mind of his own type was, if not that of positive aversion, at least that of defective liking and very stunted admiration. One is sorry for the fact; but it cannot be helped. In this case, somehow or other, De Quincey's mind was blocked, and its faculty of intellectual appreciation stiffened, by a needless fury of ethical orthodoxy. The imaginary polygamy and what not else in Plato's ideal Republic so moved De Quincey's loathing that, like the most ordinary and matter-of-fact little Christian in any half-educated conventicle, he behaved as if the whole of Plato was summed up in this one extravagance, and assaulted him accordingly.

Masson is no doubt right in his determination of the chief cause of De Quincey's aversion to Plato. De Quincey's attitude is indeed one of perverse moral prejudice, and many of his attacks against Plato on other than moral grounds can be explained as a rationalization of his initial dislike. But, although he defines correctly the basis of De Quincey's special animus against Plato, Masson misconceives the situation when he supposes that it was only a fury of ethical orthodoxy that stood in the way of De Quincey's discovering an affinity between Plato's mind and his own. The assumption that Plato was the world's mastermind of De Quincey's own type is a misleading half-truth. The point is important because it gives the key to the proper interpretation of De Quincey's relation to philosophy in general.

In asserting that De Quincey was predisposed by nature to be a Platonist rather than an Aristotelian, Masson gives evidence of a failure to comprehend the central paradox of his mind. De Quincey was, by nature, both an intellectualist and a mystic; he was not, however, an intellectual mystic. The evidence for this proposition must be offered piecemeal, but De Quincey's attitude toward Plato and Aristotle constitutes a foundation of proof.

De Quincey gives two criticisms of Plato which are general in application and which rise above mere personal prejudice. He charges first that there is no systematic whole in Plato:

. . . It is customary to talk of a Platonic philosophy as a coherent whole that may be gathered by concentration from his disjointed dialogues. My belief is that no such systematic whole exists. Fragmentary views are all that remain in his works. The four minds from whom we have received the nearest approximation to an orbicular system, or total body of philosophy, are those of Aristotle, of Des Cartes, of Leibnitz, and, lastly, of Immanuel Kant. All these men have manifested an ambition to complete the cycle of their philosophic speculations; but, for all that, not one of them has come near to his object. How much less can any such cycle or systematic whole be ascribed to Plato! His dialogues are a succession of insulated essays upon problems just then engaging the attention of thoughtful men in Greece. But we know not how much of these speculations may really belong to those interlocutors into whose mouths so large a proportion is thrown; nor have we any means of discriminating between such doctrines as were put forward by way of tentative explorations, or trials of dialectic adroitness, and, on the other hand, such as Plato adopted in sincerity of heart, whether originated by his master or by himself.¹⁷

The second charge, expressed only in scattered phrases, is that Plato's expression and thought are mystical, visionary, vague.¹⁸

Thus De Quincey criticizes the philosophy of Plato on the grounds that it is fanciful and obscure and that it fails to form an adequate and coherent whole. He names that of Aristotle as among the great systems, refers to the *Organon* as "that most perfect of human works,"¹⁹ and calls its author "that pure starry intelligence."²⁰ He judges both in terms of a standard of intellectual adequacy—of lucidity, logicity, comprehensiveness. He thus reveals himself as a thorough-going intellectualist on the plane of philosophical speculation.

¹⁷ "Plato's Republic," VIII, 45. Elsewhere De Quincey seeks to impeach the form of the dialogue as a *modus philosophandi*: "There is a far larger and subtler class of cases where the arguments for and against are not susceptible of this separate valuation. One is valid only through and by a second, which second again is involved in a third; and so on You must *hold on*; you must keep fast hold of certain principles until you have time to catch hold of certain others—seven or eight, suppose; and then from the whole taken in continuation, but not from any one as an insulated principle, you come into a power of adjudicating upon the pretensions of the whole theory" ("Style," X, 184-185).

¹⁸ "Plato's Republic," VIII, 47-48. We shall find that De Quincey praises Kant for his freedom from "Platonic reveries."

¹⁹ "Autobiography," II, 93.

²⁰ "The English Language," XIV, 148.

Because De Quincey was an enemy of the mystical or visionary in philosophy, he could not, even had there been no special blockage of his sympathy with Plato, have espoused the Platonic metaphysics. Yet he might, as a mystic in the realm of the spiritual life, as a believer in the shadowiness of all deep truth of the spirit, have discovered an appreciation for the poetry of Plato's thought. As it was, he shows himself not entirely insensitive to this. Even in a context in which his comment is on the whole disparaging, he writes that

. . . In Plato there is a gloomy grandeur at times from the elementary mysteries of man's situation and origin, snatches of music from some older and Orphic philosophy, which impress a vague feeling of solemnity towards the patriarch of the school [Plato], though you can seldom trace *his* movement through all this high and vapoury region.²¹

An account of De Quincey's mysticism of feeling can best be given in a later section.

De Quincey fails to comment on the specific metaphysical doctrines of either Plato or Aristotle. He has little to say of Plato's views as they relate to art. It is understandable enough that he should take exception to his "celebrated doctrine imputing mischievous falsehood to the poets,"²² but he fails to discuss the particular ground of Plato's criticism of poetry, an analysis of which would have brought out interesting side lights on his own aesthetic: namely, the charge that poetry is thrice removed from the real.

Leibnitz seems to share with Aristotle the position next highest to Kant in the scheme of De Quincey's philosophical evaluations. He is praised as a polyhistor,²³ a truly comprehensive mind: "There are such people as Leibnitzes on this earth; and their office seems not that of planets—to revolve within the limits of one system, but that of comets

²¹ "Style," X, 183. It is interesting to note that just as De Quincey could not altogether fail to respond to the sublimity in Plato's thought, so also he could not fail to acknowledge the *art* of the Platonic dialogues. In writing of Landor he asserts that both Plato and Landor "bestowed pains as elaborate upon the secret *art* of a dialogue as a lapidary would upon the cutting of a Sultan's rubies" ("Notes on Walter Savage Landor," XI, 398).

²² "Plato's Republic," VIII, 54.

²³ "Letters to a Young Man," X, 16.

(according to the theory of some speculators)—to connect different systems together."²⁴ Leibnitz's philosophic style is excellent: "... to subjects already difficult in themselves he brings no superadded difficulties of language."²⁵ Thus again we find De Quincey's encomiums given on a basis of comprehensiveness and clarity. In Leibnitz he found the enunciation of clarifying distinctions of the sort so congenial to his mind; he refers more than once to that between the *ratio cognoscendi* and the *ratio essendi*: "I have often remarked that the largest and most subtle source of error in philosophic speculations has been the confounding of [these] two great principles"²⁶

De Quincey made few comments on Spinoza, but held him in high esteem: "... for subtlety and power no intellect could be named on a level with the Jew Spinoza."²⁷ We have already seen that he recognizes Descartes as among the great system-making minds. But Descartes' method of proving the existence of the Deity

. . . was altogether separate and peculiar to himself; it is a mere conjurer's juggle; and yet, what is strange, like some other audacious sophisms, it is capable of being so stated as most of all to baffle the subtle dialectician; and Kant himself, though not cheated, was never so much perplexed in his life as in the effort to make its hollowness apparent.²⁸

Turning to a survey of De Quincey's views on the English philosophers, we find him negatively defining the empirical character of English philosophy by stating that the speculative philosophy of England has at all times tended to hide itself in theology.²⁹ We should not expect De Quincey, with his passion for metaphysical speculation on the one hand and his depth of religious conviction on the other, to be friendly to English empiricism either in its method or in the materialistic implications of so much of it. Yet he was an

²⁴ "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater," X, 451.

²⁵ "Kant in His Miscellaneous Essays," VIII, 92.

²⁶ "Autobiography," II, 78; cf. "Plato's Republic," VIII, 58.

²⁷ "Richard Bentley," IV, 135.

²⁸ "Protestantism," VIII, 262 n.

²⁹ "The Last Days of Kant," IV, 325 n.

Englishman, with an Englishman's pride in the achievements of his countrymen and an Englishman's appreciation of the practical approach, even to philosophy, and this fact mitigates his hostility to the English tradition. Furthermore, he came under the influence of German philosophy at the beginning of his philosophical studies, and his full acceptance of the view that the mind transcends sense experience released him from active animosity toward those philosophers whose thought might otherwise have plagued his feelings. What we find is a mixed attitude.

De Quincey names Bacon as one of the heroes of philosophy, but does not discuss his contribution.³⁰

He indicates his opinion of Hobbes in several places, and in view of the atheistic implications of Hobbes's thought it occasions no surprise: "We privately hate Mr. Thomas Hobbes, of Malmsbury; we know much evil of him, and we could expose many of his tricks effectually."³¹ Hobbes's acuteness is the "gift of shallowness," of not being subtle or profound enough.³²

De Quincey dislikes Locke also. He refers regretfully to Locke's popularity among

. . . the "Rational" Dissenters: those whose religion begins and terminates in the understanding. This idolatry is paid to him in a double character, as the most eminent patron of religious liberty, and as the propounder of views in Christianity pretty much akin to their own want of depth, and in "anti-mysticism," as a friend might call it, but, speaking sincerely, in hostility to all that is unfathomable by the mere discursive understanding.³³

In another context he expresses his agreement with the view that

. . . it [is] shocking and almost damnable to an English University, the great well-heads of creeds, moral and evangelical, that authors such in respect of doctrine as Paley and Locke should hold that high and influential station as teachers, or rather oracles of truth, which has been conceded to them.³⁴

³⁰ "Dr. Samuel Parr," V, 95.

³³ "London Reminiscences," III, 130.

³¹ *Posthumous Works*, I, 101.

³⁴ "Autobiography," II, 76.

³² "Literary Reminiscences," II, 340.

In both of these discussions he speaks of certain blunders in Locke's philosophy undetected by any except himself, which he will sometime expose. But the promise is never fulfilled. In his single exposition of Kant's basic thought he indicates the extent to which Locke's doctrine parallels Kant's.³⁵

De Quincey is unsympathetic with Locke for reasons interestingly antithetical to those which account for his lack of sympathy with Platonism. He finds in Locke a merely common-sense philosophy, a philosophy uninformed by any comprehension of the depths of spiritual reality. Such a philosophy was as little satisfying to the spiritual side of his mind as was a cloudy mystical one to his intellect. His quest was for a philosophy that should be both intellectually and spiritually adequate.

It is especially for the lack of spirituality in their ethics that he views with displeasure the academic dominance of Locke and Paley. De Quincey's mysticism is primarily a moral mysticism, and a prudential or utilitarian principle in ethics antagonized the deepest of his feelings. In two different places he attacks Paley's theory on purely logical grounds. One of these discussions ends as follows:

. . . Perhaps it is not very important how a man *theorises* upon morality. Happily for us all, God has left no man in such questions practically to the guidance of his understanding; but still, considering that academic bodies *are* partly constituted for the support of speculative truth as well as truth practical, we must think it a blot upon the splendour of Oxford and Cambridge that both of them, in a Christian land, make Paley the foundation of their ethics, the alternative being Aristotle. And in our mind, though far inferior as a moralist to the Stoics, Aristotle is often less of a pagan than Paley.³⁶

Toward Hume De Quincey displays less unkindly feeling than might be expected—perhaps because he was grateful for the service Hume rendered Kant in awakening him from his "dogmatic slumber." He refers specifically to the fact that the *Essay on Necessary Connexion* was the seed that ger-

³⁵ "Autobiography," II, 100.

³⁶ "Coleridge and Opium-Eating," V, 194. For De Quincey's fullest refutation of Paley see "Autobiography," II, 76-78.

minated "into the mighty forest of German philosophy."³⁷ Again he speaks of "this memorable effort of scepticism applied by Hume to one capital phenomenon among the necessities of the human understanding."³⁸ But of course Hume's solution is worthless. In another connection De Quincey declares that the problem which Hume stated, "whether excogitated *proprio Marte* or not, . . . is unquestionably the most remarkable contribution to philosophy ever made by man."³⁹ In his essay "Miracles as Subjects of Testimony,"⁴⁰ he sets out to refute Hume's arguments against miracles.

Because of the special interest attaching to the relation of the romantic critics to Hartley, the two or three passages which indicate De Quincey's opinion of Hartley will be given in full. The first of them concerns Hazlitt primarily, but is no less interesting on that account:

. . . Amongst the philosophical works of Hazlitt, I do not observe that Mr. Gilfillan is aware of two that are likely to be specially interesting. One is an examination of David Hartley, at least as to his law of association. Thirty years ago I looked into it slightly; but my reverence for Hartley offended me with its tone; and afterwards, hearing that Coleridge challenged for his own most of what was important in the thoughts, I lost all interest in the essay. Hazlitt unavoidably, having heard Coleridge talk on this theme, must have approached it with a mind largely preoccupied as regarded the weak points in Hartley, and the particular tactics for assailing them. But still the great talents for speculative research which Hazlitt had from nature . . . would justify our attentive examination of the work.⁴¹

³⁷ "Dr. Samuel Parr," V, 110.

³⁸ "Autobiography," II, 90. Cf.: ". . . with every allowance for the detection made in Thomas Aquinas of the original suggestion, as recorded in the *Biographia Literaria* of Coleridge, we must still allow great merit of a secondary kind to Hume for his modern revival and restatement of the doctrine" (*ibid.*, p. 92).

³⁹ "Recollections of Hannah More," XIV, 127.

⁴⁰ VIII, 157-176.

⁴¹ "Notes on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits: Hazlitt*," XI, 351-352. Elsewhere De Quincey speaks much less favorably of Hazlitt's philosophical talents: "Hazlitt accordingly is styled 'the great thinker' [by Sergeant Talfourd]. But, had he even been such potentially, there was an absolute bar to his achievement of that station in act and consummation. No man *can* be a great thinker in our days upon large and elaborate questions without being also a

In the chapter on Coleridge in his "Literary Reminiscences," De Quincey describes an occasion on which Coleridge, meeting Bishop Richard Watson, presented some of the arguments against Hartley which he had used in the *Biographia Literaria*:

. . . The Bishop made but a feeble defense; and upon some points none at all. He seemed, I remember, much struck with one remark of Coleridge's, to this effect:—"That, whereas Hartley fancied that our very reasoning was an aggregation, collected together under the law of association, on the contrary, we reason by counteracting that law: just," said he, "as, in leaping, the law of gravitation concurs to that act in its latter part; but no leap could take place were it not by a counteraction of the law."⁴²

From these statements one gathers that De Quincey shares Coleridge's later attitude toward Hartley, while yet maintaining a considerable respect for the latter and feeling nothing of *animosity* against his philosophy. Such an interpretation is confirmed by his most direct pronouncement. He had carried to Coleridge a rare Latin pamphlet, *De Ideis*, written by Hartley about 1746; a discussion of Hartleian theory had ensued:

It is known to most literary people that Coleridge was, in early life, so passionate an admirer of the Hartleian philosophy that "Hartley" was the sole baptismal name which he gave to his eldest child; and in an early poem, entitled "Religious Musings," he had characterized Hartley as

"Him of mortal kind
Wisest, him first who mark'd the ideal tribes
Up the fine fibres through the sentient brain
Pass in fine surges."

But at present (August 1807) all this was a forgotten thing. Coleridge was so profoundly ashamed of the shallow Unitarianism of Hartley, and

great student." Hazlitt had not "read down to his own starting-point"; in fact, says De Quincey, he had read nothing. "The very reason for Hazlitt's defect in eloquence as a lecturer is sufficient also as a reason why he could not have been a comprehensive thinker . . . Hazlitt was not eloquent, because he was discontinuous . . . Hazlitt's thoughts were of the same fractured and discontinuous order as his illustrative images—seldom or never self-diffusive; and *that* is a sufficient argument that he had never cultivated philosophic thinking" ("Charles Lamb," V, 230-232).

⁴² II, 202.

so disgusted to think that he could at any time have countenanced that creed, that he would scarcely allow to Hartley the reverence which is undoubtedly his due; for I must contend that, waiving all question of the extent to which Hartley would have pushed it (as though the law of association accounted not only for our complex pleasures and pains, but also might be made to explain the act of ratiocination),—waiving also the physical substratum of nervous vibrations and miniature vibrations to which he has chosen to marry his theory of association;—all this apart, I must contend that the “Essay on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations” stands forward as a specimen almost unique of elaborate theorizing, and a monument of absolute beauty in the impression left of its architectural grace. In this respect it has, to my mind, the spotless beauty and the ideal proportions of some Grecian statue.⁴³

The sentence which follows immediately upon the above, though not relating to Hartley, is an immensely significant self-characterization of the mystical side of De Quincey's mind:

. . . However, I confess that, being myself, from my earliest years, a reverential believer in the doctrine of the Trinity, simply because I never attempted to bring all things within the mechanic understanding, and because, like Sir Thomas Browne, my mind almost demanded mysteries in so mysterious a system of relations as those which connect us with another world, and also because the farther my understanding opened the more I perceived of dim analogies to strengthen my creed, and because nature herself, mere physical nature, has mysteries no less profound; for these and for many other “*because*s,” I could not reconcile with my general reverence for Mr. Coleridge the fact, so often reported to me, that he was a Unitarian.⁴⁴

It seems evident that De Quincey experienced no such revulsion of feeling toward Hartley as did Coleridge. Apparently he was able to reconcile his rejection of Hartley's central position with a genuine admiration for his intellectual powers and achievements. It may be that the violence of Coleridge's reaction was something of a vicarious experience for De Quincey, with the result that he was released from the

⁴³ “Literary Reminiscences,” II, 153–154.

⁴⁴ “One may observe the capricious movement of De Quincey's thought through this passage as a whole. From Hartley's ideas the discussion passes to his style, and then to De Quincey's own mystical bent. The topic next dealt with in the context is Kant. We have here a striking illustration of De Quincey's characteristic tendency to indulge in intellectual libertinism.

need to react forcibly in his own right and was led rather to balance the equation of appraisal by saying everything good that he might. But the main explanation would seem to be that he had come under the influence of German philosophy at the very beginning of his life of thought; at no time had he built on Hartley as his principal foundation.

In concluding this sketch of De Quincey's relations to pre-Kantian speculation, it may be remarked that though in philosophy as in literature his blind spots are conspicuous, on occasion even appalling, the philosophers whom he praises always deserve his eulogy. The strange paradox of his mentality renders uncertain his responses to values that are not in keeping with his own, but where he sympathizes he is a safe guide. The high merit which he assigns to Coleridge as a psychologist (to be noted in the next section) may, in the light of the confirmation of his judgment by modern opinion, be mentioned as a special illustration of his critical acumen.

III. DE QUINCEY'S RELATION TO KANT AND THE ROMANTIC PHILOSOPHERS

. . . It is not usual for men to meet with their capital disappointments in early life, at least not in youth . . . My disappointment—the profound shock with which I was repelled from German philosophy, and which thenceforwards tinged with cynical disgust towards man in certain aspects a temper which originally I will presume to consider the most benign that can ever have been created—occurred when I was yet in my twentieth year.⁴⁵

So writes De Quincey of the experience which was the only crisis—and by all odds the most important event—in his life as a thinker. What was the basis of this disappointment? What was, in spite of the disillusionment, the influence of Kant's philosophy upon De Quincey's thought?

In an essay "De Quincey and Coleridge upon Kant," J. H. Stirling, writing in 1867, charged that De Quincey found Kant disappointing and "destructive" because he was ignorant of his works, having only a superficial knowledge of

⁴⁵ "Autobiography," II, 107.

small portions of them.⁴⁶ Wellek, in 1931, takes much the same position, and on the basis of certain inaccuracies in De Quincey's exposition of Kantian doctrine, even goes so far as to conjecture that the "correct formulas" of explanation which De Quincey does employ "were taken from some German exposition without any clear comprehension of their interconnection and consequences."⁴⁷ He argues further that De Quincey's personal experience with Kant, "however actual and indisputable, remained only skin-deep, the expression of a mood, of a moment's despair and tedium."⁴⁸

This last position, viewed in the light of more than the most superficial acquaintance with the facts of De Quincey's mind and intellectual history, is too absurd to require refutation. Wellek gives von Kleist credit for a sincere reaction of pain and complaint to the critical philosophy. How can he deny the same to De Quincey? On what basis can he challenge the truthfulness of De Quincey's own statement—written after thirty years:

... for at least ten long years *after* I came into a condition of valuing its true pretensions and measuring its capacities, this same philosophy shed the gloom of something like misanthropy upon my views and estimates of human nature; for man was an abject animal if the limitations which Kant assigned to the motions of his speculative reason were as absolute and hopeless as, under *his* scheme of the understanding and *his* genesis of their powers, too evidently they were. I belonged to a reptile race, if the wings by which we had sometimes *seemed* to mount, and the buoyancy which had *seemed* to support our flight, were indeed the fantastic delusions which he represented them. Such, and so deep and so abiding in its influence upon my life, [was] the influence of this German philosophy . . .⁴⁹

The charge that De Quincey was ignorant of the true Kantian position is scarcely more tenable than the one that his disappointment was only superficial. Writing for a popular audience and not troubling to verify the impressions of

⁴⁶ "De Quincey and Coleridge upon Kant," in *Jerrold, Tennyson and Macaulay, with Other Critical Essays* (Edinburgh, 1868), pp. 172-188.

⁴⁷ René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England 1793-1838* (Princeton, 1931), p. 179.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁹ "Autobiography," II, 89.

his memory, he may have slipped into minor technical errors; but his grasp of the main principles and conclusions of the first and second of the three great Critiques cannot be successfully challenged. His extreme pronouncements about Kant are explicable enough when they are taken, not in isolation, but as part of his entire body of statement, and when they are viewed in the light of an understanding of what it was that he sought from philosophy. Such a pronouncement is the following:

. . . Perhaps, in the whole history of man, it is an unexampled case that such a scheme of speculation [as Kant's]—which offers nothing seducing to human aspirations, nothing splendid to the human imagination, nothing even positive and affirmative to the human understanding—should have been able to found an interest so broad and deep among thirty-five millions of cultivated men . . . it is a fact that all its doctrines are negative—teaching, in no case, what we *are*, but simply what we are *not*, to believe—and that all its truths are barren. Such being its unpopular character, I cannot but imagine that the German people have received it with so much ardour from profound incomprehension of its meaning, and utter blindness to its drift . . . ⁵⁰

Judged by itself, this might indeed seem proof positive that De Quincey did not understand the philosophy of Kant.

It is necessary first of all to define more fully than we have as yet the special approach that De Quincey made to philosophy. His demands were for something more than logic, clarity, and comprehensiveness. S. H. Hodgson, writing in reply to Stirling, expresses the case neatly:

. . . De Quincey approached Kant with the pre-occupation of theology; the philosophy, or rather what did duty for one, with which he started was that of a thoughtful disciple of the Church of England; the question with him was, what light was thrown by the originator of the Transcendental Theory upon this world of thought and belief. From that point of view it was that Kant appeared . . . utterly destructive. Kant's theory sweeps wholly away the old speculative foundations of theology.⁵¹

In short, according to Hodgson, "De Quincey's position, then, is that of a man forced to give an unwilling assent to

⁵⁰ "Autobiography," II, 86-87.

⁵¹ *Outcast Essays and Verse Translations* (London, 1881), pp. 36-37.

the main conceptions of a system which he regards with dismay, as destroying, or at least endangering, the best hopes and aspirations of humanity."⁵² W. A. Dunn⁵³ follows the same line of explanation.

De Quincey was first a Christian, then a philosopher; first a creature of profoundly emotional belief, then an intellectual being who sought the satisfaction of understanding, speculatively, the system of ideas which he accepted on the basis of his intuitions and his faith in Scriptural revelation. He tells us that he could not think "that any man, though he make himself a marvellously clever disputant, ever could tower upwards into a very great philosopher unless he should begin or should end with Christianity."⁵⁴ And he states that

. . . Beyond the boundary and ring-fence of an ultimate faith in the capital articles of revealed truth no man can trespass without a risk of losing his compass; he cannot speculate safely so far as *that*. But *within* this boundary and up to its extremest limits, lies an immense field of invitation to the energies of the speculative understanding—a field fertile in problems of every class.⁵⁵

Evidently his quarrel with Kant is that he did trespass beyond this boundary, in writing "with such habitual contempt for revealed religion,"⁵⁶ in denying that man possesses knowledge of the noumenal world.

Kant, he states, is a dubious exception to the rule that a great philosopher must begin or end with Christianity.

. . . Not that I mean to question his august pretensions, so far as they went, and in his proper line. Within his own circle none durst tread but he. But that circle was limited. He was called, by one who weighed him well, the *alles-zermalmender*, the world-shattering Kant. He could destroy—his intellect was essentially destructive. He was the Gog and he was the Magog of Hunnish desolation to the existing schemes of Philosophy. He probed them; he showed the vanity of vanities which besieged their foundations—the rottenness below, the

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵³ *Thomas De Quincey's Relation to German Literature and Philosophy* (Strassburg, 1900).

⁵⁴ "Literary Reminiscences," II, 155.

⁵⁵ "Memorial Chronology," XIV, 311.

⁵⁶ "Kant in His Miscellaneous Essays," VIII, 102.

hollowness above. But he had no instincts of creation or restoration within his Apollyon mind; for he had no love, no faith, no self-distrust, no humility, no childlike docility . . . Who can read without indignation of Kant, that, at his own table, in social sincerity and confidential talk, . . . he exulted in the prospect of absolute and ultimate annihilation; that he planted his glory in the grave, and was ambitious of rotting for ever?⁵⁷

Here, again, we have a patently false characterization of Kant and his philosophy. But De Quincey speaks very differently in other, and saner, moments. We can only say that it is characteristic of him to be inconsistent at times, characteristic that he is completely blinded whenever he finds, or thinks he finds, evidence of anti-Christian feeling. On these occasions, in regard to Kant, he appears to turn his mind exclusively on the negative or destructive portions of Kantian doctrine. And certain statements of Kant's, like certain statements of De Quincey's, give very misleading impressions when considered in isolation.

De Quincey's knowledge of Kant must be judged not by the bitter utterances of moments of outraged feeling, but by the sober expressions of sympathetic understanding. He calls Kant "the most sincere, honourable, and truthful of human beings,"⁵⁸ and his philosophy "great and central,"⁵⁹ "so comprehensive as to leave no track of legitimate interests untouched, and so profound as to presuppose many preparatory exercises of the understanding."⁶⁰ He shows a fine appreciation of the significance of Kant's terminology, stating that Kant's new terms not only recorded notions necessary to his system, but that apart from the system they extended the domain of human thought: "The terminology of Kant . . . is not a rebaptism of ideas already existing in the universal consciousness; it is in part an enlargement of the understanding by new territory . . . and in part a better regulation of its old territory."⁶¹ And in the same context in which he points

⁵⁷ "Literary Reminiscences," II, 155. For a fuller statement of De Quincey's view that Kant was hostile to Christianity see "Kant in His Miscellaneous Essays," VIII, 95-102.

⁵⁸ "Language," X, 262 n.

⁵⁹ "Autobiography," II, 85.

⁶⁰ "Letters to a Young Man," X, 65.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

out the value of Kant's terminology, he gives an admirable definition of the rightful criteria to be employed in judging the Kantian or any other system of philosophy:

... It is asked which is the true philosophy. But this is not the just way of putting the question. The purpose of philosophy is not so much to accumulate positive truths in the first place as to rectify the position of the human mind, and to correct its mode of seeing. The progress of the human species in this path is not direct, but oblique. . . .

The test of a great philosophical system is often falsely conceived. Men fancy a certain number of great outstanding problems of the highest interest to human nature, upon which every system is required to try its strength; and *that* will be the true one, they think, which solves them all, and *that* the best approximation to the true one which solves most. But this is a most erroneous way of judging. True philosophy will often have occasion to show that these supposed problems are no problems at all, but mere impositions of the mind upon itself, arising out of its unrectified position—errors grounded upon errors. A much better test of a sound philosophy than the number of the pre-existing problems which it solves will be the quality of those which it proposes. By raising the station of the spectator, it will bring a region of new inquiry within his view This is a fact which should never be lost sight of by those who presume upon their natural and uncultivated powers of mind to judge of Kant, Plato,⁶² or any other great philosopher.⁶³

This is as discerning and as sound doctrine as was ever preached about the nature of philosophy. It is by his penetrating insights, not by his aberrations, that De Quincey must be judged.

Having attempted an explanation of the ground of De Quincey's disappointment in Kant, and having indicated in a general way the fact of his real appreciation of the Kantian philosophy despite his fulminations against it, we turn to an examination of the particulars of his position.

In the chapter of the "Autobiography" which contains his only connected analysis of Kantian doctrine De Quincey traces the steps in Kant's deduction of the categories, and ends his exposition with this generalization:

... Thus, then, without going one step further, the reader will find grounds enough for reflection, and for reverence towards Kant, in these

⁶² De Quincey's only wholly favorable reference to Plato!

⁶³ "Letters to a Young Man," X, 78-79.

two great results: 1st, That an order of ideas has been established which all deep philosophy has demanded, even when it could not make good its claim. This postulate is fulfilled. 2dly, The postulate is fulfilled without mysticism or Platonic reveries. Ideas, however, indispensable to human needs, and even to the connexion of our thoughts, which came to us from nobody knew whence must forever have been suspicious But, deduced as they now are from a matrix within our own minds, they cannot reasonably fear any assaults of skepticism.⁶⁴

De Quincey thus accepts the doctrine of the categories. He does so willingly, even enthusiastically. It is, he goes on to say, Kant's applications of it that are "of a nature to make any man melancholy." But, though depressing, these applications "are yet painfully irritating to the curiosity, and especially so from a sort of *experimentum crucis* which they yield in the progress of their development on behalf of the entire doctrine of Kant—a test which, up to this hour, has offered defiance to any hostile hand."⁶⁵ The test is that of the antinomies: ". . . the logic is irresistible, the links are perfect."⁶⁶

There follows an account of space and time as forms of perception, and the enunciation of another distinct merit of the transcendental philosophy: namely, "Its harmony with mathematics, and the fact of having first, by its doctrine of space, applied philosophy to the nature of geometrical evidence." Here De Quincey's exposition stops with the remark that, "All the rest [of the Kantian philosophy], with a reserve as to the part which concerns the *practical* reason (or will), is of more questionable value, and leads to manifold disputes."⁶⁷

From his statements in this particular context it might appear that De Quincey suspends judgment on Kant's principal conclusion (that knowledge of the noumenal world is impossible), while admitting that he finds no way of resisting it logically. But it is clear enough from the body of his comment in general that he yields acceptance, however reluctantly, to this thesis—in so far as knowledge is to be defined in terms of speculative understanding. He could not well

⁶⁴ II, 99.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

do otherwise while agreeing with the Kantian view of the categories and the forms of perception; this much is admitted in the assertion we have noticed that "man was an abject animal if the limitations which Kant assigned to the motions of his speculative reason were as absolute and hopeless as, under *his* scheme of the understanding and *his* genesis of their powers, too evidently they were."⁶⁸

The fact that his feelings were shocked by Kant's conclusion does not signify that he rejected it. Indeed the very intensity of the shock it inflicted is a measure of the credibility he was forced to concede to it. Kant would not have been the Gog and the Magog of desolation to existing schemes of philosophy, he would not have been world-shattering, had he *not* successfully demonstrated the impotence of reason to attain knowledge of the real world. And De Quincey's statements (see the next section) concerning the weakness and the unreliability of the "mere understanding" are a confession of his acceptance of the Kantian position.

If, then, De Quincey accedes to the main conclusion of Kant's first Critique, in what sense does he blame Kant for the destructiveness of his philosophy? Would he have had him desist from pursuing reason where reason led, even though it arrived at the revolutionary limitation of its own powers? Surely the answer to the latter question is no. De Quincey's censure of Kant for his destructiveness is hardly to be regarded as rational censure: it is an outcry of pain and disappointment. His real criticism, in any event, is not that Kant destroyed but that he failed to reconstruct—to replace what he took away with something as good or better.

But what of the doctrine of the practical reason? Was not that constructive? Was it not a great thing that faith should be sanctioned by reason? We have already seen (p. 34) that in describing the critical philosophy as questionable beyond a certain point, De Quincey makes a reservation with respect to the doctrine of the practical reason.

There is a passage in the essay "Protestantism" from which it might seem that he finds the testimony as to final

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

realities offered by the practical reason to be no less satisfying to the mind than would be the demonstration of those realities by the speculative reason. It begins with the statement that Kant was the first person ever to undertake formally to demonstrate the indemonstrability of God. Kant showed the three great scholastic arguments for the existence of the Deity to be virtually one, and then, in De Quincey's phrase, he broke the neck of this one:

. . . but . . . these three, after all, were only the arguments of speculating or *theoretic* reason. To this faculty Kant peremptorily denied the power of demonstrating the Deity; but then that same *apodeixis*, which he had thus inexorably torn from reason under one manifestation, Kant himself restored to the reason in another (the *praktische vernunft*). God he asserts to be a postulate of the human reason, as speaking through the conscience and will, not proved *ostensively*, but indirectly proved as being *wanted* indispensably, and presupposed in other necessities of our human nature. . . . But then it should not have been said [by a writer whom De Quincey is examining] that the case does not "admit of formal proof," since the proof is as "formal" and rigorous by this new method of Kant as by the old obsolete methods of Sam. Clarke and the schoolmen.⁶⁹

But evidently De Quincey is indulging here in a bit of what, according to his own conception, may be called "rhetorical" argument—argument designed to get the better of an opponent by obtaining a momentary acquiescence of the mind. If, indeed, the new method constituted actual proof—proof as formal and as rigorous as the old, the critical philosophy would not have shed the gloom of something like misanthropy upon his views of human nature for a decade or more. This passage not alone falsifies Kant; it falsifies De Quincey's real understanding of and attitude toward the Kantian position.

That De Quincey understood that the doctrine of the practical reason stops short of intellectual demonstration is indicated when he says, speaking of immortality: "But on that theme—beware, reader! Listen to no *intellectual* argument. One argument there is, one only there is, of philosophic value: an argument drawn from the *moral* nature of

man: an argument of Immanuel Kant's. The rest are dust and ashes."⁷⁰ The argument from the moral nature of man is not an intellectual one; that is to say, it is not an argument of pure reason, and it cannot, therefore, give speculative proof. Yet, since it is, after all, a reasonable argument, since the faith it sanctions is a reasonable faith, it has philosophical value.

It seems evident that De Quincey was grateful for the argument of the practical reason as being better than no argument at all. But he was not satisfied with it. The faith which it licensed was not knowledge, and he hungered for intellectual certainty. Doubtless he rebelled, moreover, against the status which Kant assigned to the ideas of God, freedom, and immortality in their relation to the speculative reason—the status of mere regulative ideas. He was not able to give credence to the view maintained by Coleridge that Kant held a position beyond that which he explicitly defined.⁷¹

De Quincey's writings make no mention of Kant's great third Critique or of its doctrines. It might be thought that the *Critique of Judgement* would have made a strong impression on his mind as hinting at a metaphysics more satis-

⁷⁰ "Lake Reminiscences," II, 402.

⁷¹ "It is . . . characteristic of Mr. Coleridge's mind that it never gives back anything as it receives it In one of his works he has ascribed to Kant the foppiness of an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine and that upon grounds wholly untenable. The direct and simple-minded Kant, I am persuaded, would have been more shocked at this suspicion than any other with which he could have been loaded" ("Letters to a Young Man," X, 77-78). As Masson points out, De Quincey's reference must be chiefly to Chapter IX of the *Biographia Literaria* (edited by J. Shawcross [Oxford, 1907]), where Coleridge writes: "The few passages [in Kant] that remained obscure to me . . . and the apparent contradictions which occur, I soon found were hints and insinuations referring to ideas, which KANT either did not think it prudent to avow, or which he considered as consistently *left behind* in a pure analysis, not of human nature in toto, but of the speculative intellect alone In spite . . . of his own declarations, I could never believe, that it was possible for him to have meant no more by his *Noumenon*, or THING IN ITSELF, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole *plastic* power to the forms of the intellect I entertained doubts likewise, whether in his own mind he even laid *all* the stress, which he appears to do, on the moral postulates" (I, 99-100).

fyng to the feelings than that of the first Critique. That it appears not to have done so—both from the fact that he does not comment upon it and from his blanket statement that most of the Kantian philosophy beyond the sections discussed was of questionable value—is admittedly strange, but doubtless is accounted for in part by the same explanation that applies to his failure to find an escape from the destructiveness of Kant in the idealistic philosophy which followed Kant in Germany and which derived much from the third Critique. We turn, accordingly, to an examination of the evidence regarding his relationship to post-Kantian speculation.

De Quincey's comment on the romantic philosophers is as unenthusiastic as it is brief and infrequent. But although brief, his utterances give a unified and clear impression of De Quincey's attitude. In one context he implies that Fichte and Schelling were given to "mere Athenian subtlety upon any subject that might most tax their own ingenuity."⁷² Elsewhere he speaks of Hegel as "that great master of the impenetrable" whom he doubts if anyone has read, judging from the commentaries which have been written upon him.⁷³ Writing in 1834, he speaks of

... the endless freaks in philosophy of Modern Germany, where the sceptre of Mutability, that potentate celebrated by Spenser, gathers more trophies in a year than elsewhere in a century; "the anarchy of dreams" presides in her philosophy; and the restless elements of opinion, throughout every region of debate, mould themselves eternally, like the billowy sands of the desert as beheld by Bruce, into towering columns, soar upwards to a giddy altitude, then stalk about for a minute, all aglow with fiery colour, and finally un mould and "dislimn," with a collapse as sudden as the motions of that eddying breeze under which their vapoury architecture had arisen.⁷⁴

The sole remaining comment, and the most fully revelatory of them all, is a part of De Quincey's discussion of plagiarism in Coleridge. After speaking of Coleridge's "real and palpable" plagiarism from Schelling, he calls the latter

⁷² "Professor Wilson," V, 300.

⁷³ "Notes on Walter Savage Landor," XI, 399 n.

⁷⁴ "Literary Reminiscences," II, 202.

"the great Bavarian professor—a man in some respects worthy to be Coleridge's assessor⁷⁵"—and he continues:

. . . In the "Biographia Literaria" occurs a dissertation upon the reciprocal relations of the *Esse* and the *Cogitare*,—that is, of the *objective* and the *subjective*: and an attempt is made, by inverting the postulates from which the argument starts, to show how each might arise as a product, by an intelligible genesis, from the other. It is a subject which, since the time of Fichte, has much occupied the German metaphysicians; and many thousands of essays have been written on it, or indirectly so, of which many hundreds have been read by many tens of persons. Coleridge's essay, in particular, is prefaced by a few words in which, aware of his coincidence with Schelling, he declares his willingness to acknowledge himself indebted to so great a man in any case where the truth would allow him to do so; but, in this particular case, insisting on the impossibility that he could have borrowed arguments which he had first seen some years after he had thought out the whole hypothesis *proprio Marte*. After this, what was my astonishment to find that the entire essay, from the first word to the last, is a *verbatim* translation from Schelling . . . ? Some other obligations to Schelling, of a slighter kind, I have met with in the "Biographia Literaria"; but this was a barefaced plagiarism, which could in prudence have been risked only by relying too much upon the slight knowledge of German literature in this country, and especially of that section of the German literature. Had, then, Coleridge any need to borrow from Schelling? Did he borrow in *forma pauperis*? Not at all: there lay the wonder. He spun daily and at all hours, for mere amusement of his own activities, and from the loom of his own magical brain, theories more gorgeous by far, and supported by a pomp and luxury of images such as neither Schelling—no, nor any German that ever breathed, not John Paul—could have emulated in his dreams. With the riches of El Dorado lying about him, he would condescend to filch a handful of gold from any man whose purse he fancied . . . ⁷⁶

The passage has been quoted at such length because it throws light on De Quincey's opinions of both Schelling and Coleridge. It is clear that, while looking upon Schelling with great respect and while admitting Coleridge's plagiarism from him, De Quincey did not think of him, or indeed of any German, as the fountainhead of such philosophic theory as

⁷⁵ De Quincey evidently uses the word in the sense of one who is equal or next in rank.

⁷⁶ "Literary Reminiscences," II, 145–146.

Coleridge's mind busied itself with, and that he thought Coleridge more than the equal of the Germans in intellectual fertility. On this latter point there exists an even more direct statement:

. . . It yet remains as a work of the highest interest, to estimate . . . Coleridge in his character of great philosophic thinker, in which character he united perfections that never *were* united but in three persons on this earth, in himself, in Plato (as many suppose), and in Schelling, viz., the utmost expansion and in some paths the utmost depths of the searching intellect with the utmost sensibility to the powers and purposes of art . . . His powers as a Psychologist (not as a Metaphysician) seem to me absolutely unrivalled on earth. And had his health been better . . . had his pecuniary embarrassments been even moderately lightened . . . and had his studies been more systematically directed to one end—my conviction is that he would have left a greater philosophic monument of his magnificent mind than Aristotle, or Lord Bacon, or Leibnitz.⁷⁷

But what is of primary interest in the passage regarding Coleridge's plagiarism from Schelling, is not De Quincey's estimate of the relative merits of the Germans and of Coleridge, but the indication of his attitude toward the brand of speculation both indulged in. It is for "gorgeous" theories, theories "supported by a pomp and luxury of images," theories spun "for mere amusement of his own activities," that De Quincey praises Coleridge. And in the other account, it is as a psychologist, *not* as a metaphysician, that he praises him. Is it not evident that De Quincey's interest in idealistic metaphysics was that of a connoisseur of brilliant and ingenious intellectual play—almost, we might say, of rhetoric?

But why was it such? Why did he fail to find in Schelling or in Hegel a system of ideas which made good the losses that positive philosophy sustained at the hands of Kant? The answer takes us back to the strange paradox of De Quincey's mentality, to the fact that his mysticism is divorced from his intellectualism. Even as a disappointed intellectualist he was not susceptible to the allurements of a mysticism of the intellect. We have seen that his mind did not respond to

⁷⁷ *Posthumous Works*, II, 16-17.

the mysticism of Plato. That he did not value Plotinus is suggested by his failure ever to mention him specifically. Of Neo-Platonism in general his opinion is indicated by his phrase "thaumaturgic Platonists." His highest praise of Kant is for establishing without mysticism or Platonic reveries a system of ideas which all philosophy had demanded. In a comparison of Coleridge with Herder he lists as among the defects of both, "obscure and fanciful mysticism."⁷⁸

Close as he came to demanding "mysteries in so mysterious a system of relations as those which connect us with another world," De Quincey could not tolerate the admixture of visionary ideas with the distinct and intelligible concepts proper to philosophy. There must be in philosophical inquiry no legerdemain of thoughts or words. Hence it was that the systems of post-Kantian metaphysics, though their conclusions must have been congenial to his feelings, failed to take hold of his mind other than as intellectual erections of curious interest, fascinating for the ingenuity with which elaborate superstructures were built upon doubtful or obscure assumptions. In his literary tastes, in his capacity of artist, in his theory of literature as power, De Quincey is a romantic of the romantics. But in philosophy he is not a romantic, for there his instinctive mysticism comes in conflict with his demand for intelligibility and intellectual realism. It follows, therefore, that his theory of literature, in its romantic aspects, is founded, not upon a speculative metaphysics, but upon a system of convictions which have the status of religious dogmas. What these convictions were we shall attempt to show in the remaining sections of this chapter.

It is worth remarking here that it was in large part because of the infusion of mystical philosophy in their thought, that De Quincey regarded most of the German romantic *critics* with scant respect. For him it was the pre-romantic writers and those coeval with romanticism but only loosely identified with the theory of the movement who were the heroes of German literature. Schiller and Richter were

⁷⁸ "Herder," IV, 381.

his favorites.⁷⁹ The Schlegels were "the hollowest of men,"⁸⁰ the critical works of Frederick Schlegel "being filled with such conceits, fancies, and fictions, as you would naturally expect from a clever man talking about what he had never, in any true sense of the word, read."⁸¹ De Quincey's indirect object in his long essay "Schlosser's Literary History"

. . . was to lodge, in such a broad exemplification of German ignorance, a protest against the habit (prevalent through the last fifty years [De Quincey wrote in 1847]) of yielding an extravagant precedence to German critics (on Shakspeare especially), as if better and more philosophic (because more cloudy) than our own But the Schlegels were surely not so poorly furnished for criticism as Mr. Schlosser! Why, no: in special walks of literature, if they had not arrogantly pretended to all, they were able to support the character of well-read scholars. What they were as philosophers, or at least what Frederick Schlegel was, the reader may learn from Schelling,—who in one summary footnote demolished his pretensions as by a pistol-shot. For real, serviceable exposition of Shakspeare's meaning and hidden philosophy I contend that our own domestic critics have contributed much more than Germany And, in particular, I myself find in Morgan's brief essay on the character of Falstaff more true subtlety of thought than in all the smoky comments of Rhenish or Danubian transcendentalists.⁸²

But to say that De Quincey did not accept German romantic metaphysics is not to say that he derived nothing from the German romantic philosophers and critics. He was influenced by certain points of view and he absorbed certain concepts without adhering to the theory that lay behind them. Yet except in the case of Richter, whose spirit was peculiarly congenial to his own, there is every reason for thinking that his direct debt is mainly to Coleridge and Wordsworth rather than to the Germans.

IV. THE UNDERSTANDING HEART AND THE MORAL INFINITE

Thus far the principal result of our inquiry has been to show that De Quincey was frustrated in his search for a

⁷⁹ "John Paul Frederick Richter," XI, 262.

⁸⁰ "Autobiography," II, 74.

⁸¹ "Letters to a Young Man," X, 44.

⁸² "Postscript to Schlosser's Literary History," XI, 50.

philosophy that would satisfy both the demand of his heart for certainty and the demand of his intellect for clear understanding. The critical philosophy of Kant denied the power of the speculative faculty to attain knowledge of the real world, and at the same time refused to validate as knowledge any ideas not obtained by pure reason. The systems which followed Kant were, for De Quincey, fanciful and obscure; they failed to meet the requirements of a mind predisposed by nature toward perfect clarity and rigor of thought and disciplined by the study of Kant to be critical of all initial assumptions.

Had De Quincey been, like Kant, *predominantly* an intellectual thinker he would have been compelled, in view of his adherence to the Kantian conception of the understanding, to stop where Kant stopped, taking only such solace as could be found in the doctrine of the practical reason. On the level of speculative thought, he does indeed stop with this. But, despite his intellectualism, De Quincey was in the final analysis more profoundly a creature of feeling than one of intellect. And as a man of feeling, as a moral mystic, and as a devout believer in scriptural revelation, he chose to repudiate, not the possibility of knowledge, but the particular faculty which had been shown impotent to give knowledge of ultimates—not man's power to know the truth, but that particular conception of truth according to which it is exclusively, or even primarily, an affair of speculative understanding. In short, he chose an anti-intellectualistic solution to the problem of knowledge, thus turning what was a defeat for the pretensions of reason into a victory for the claims of the feelings. In effect he redefined truth so that it became, in all high matters, primarily an affair of emotional realization, its test being not logical consistency but consistency with spiritual experience, with the feelings of the heart.

In introducing his account of the peculiar effect which the knocking at the gate after the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth* had upon his feelings, and of how he arrived in the end at an understanding of the principle involved only

through trusting to the truthfulness of his feelings, De Quincey pauses "for one moment"

. . . to exhort the reader never to pay any attention to his understanding when it stands in opposition to any other faculty of his mind. The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind, and the most to be distrusted; and yet the great majority of people trust to nothing else,—which may do for ordinary life, but not for philosophical purposes.⁸³

A strange pronouncement for an intellectualist—but it is an intellectualist disappointed by the Kantian analysis of pure reason who speaks.

Elsewhere De Quincey goes even further than to assert that the feelings should be trusted when they are in opposition to the understanding; he suggests that there is much to be said for believing a thing *because* it is incomprehensible:

. . . Tertullian's profession of believing things, not *in spite* of being impossible, but simply *because* they were impossible, is not the extravagance that most people suppose it. There is a deep truth in it. Many are the things which, in proportion as they attract the *highest* modes of belief, discover a tendency to repel belief on that part of the scale which is governed by the lower understanding . . . The highest form of the incredible is sometimes the initial form of the credible.⁸⁴

For there is a schism "(so mysterious to those even who have examined it most) between the human intellect and many undeniable realities of human experience."⁸⁵ Such statements as these make abundantly clear the difference between De Quincey's ultimate position and Kant's. For Kant, the ideas of the reason (God, freedom, and immortality), being grounded on faith, have only the validity of a reasonable hypothesis; they are not undeniable realities, but mere regulative beliefs. De Quincey would affirm them to be "higher," that is to say, better grounded, than rational beliefs. His mystery-demanding mind finds actual virtue in incomprehensibility—so long as the beliefs in question are founded, not on cloudy fantasies of the intellect, but on the affirmations of the heart.

The feelings, De Quincey maintains, are an indispensable

⁸³ "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," X, 389.

⁸⁴ "Secret Societies," VII, 178.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

agency of truth in all issues in which they are in any way involved, that is to say, in which the truth sought is in whole or in part a truth about feeling: "It is astonishing how large a harvest of new truths would be reaped simply through the accident of a man's feeling, or being made to feel, more *deeply* than other men."⁸⁶ The truth which De Quincey harvested as a result of a vivid feeling of the effect produced by the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth* is illustrative. His conviction on this matter is variously expressed:

. . . A feeble capacity of passion must, upon a question of passion, constitute a feeble range of intellect.⁸⁷

. . . to *know* is not always to *feel*; and without a correspondent depth of feeling there is in moral cases no effectual knowledge. Not the understanding is sufficient upon such ground, but that which the Scriptures in their profound philosophy entitle the "understanding heart."⁸⁸

. . . All and every basis of credibility must be laid in the *moral* nature, where the thing to be believed is important, *i.e.*, moral.⁸⁹

The understanding heart (the seat of the feelings) is, for De Quincey, an intuitive faculty "higher" than the discursive understanding, and it is the agency through which man apprehends the infinite, that is, the unconditioned or real:

. . . the Scriptures themselves never condescended to deal by suggestion or co-operation with the mere discursive understanding: when speaking of man in his intellectual capacity, the Scriptures speak not of the understanding, but of "*the understanding heart*,"—making the heart, *i.e.* the great *intuitive* (or non-discursive) organ, to be the interchangeable formula for man in his highest state of capacity for the infinite.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ "On Wordsworth's Poetry," XI, 315.

⁸⁷ "Schlosser's Literary History," XI, 24. It is interesting to compare with this statement, and with the one following, Coleridge's opinion that "deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling; and that all truth is a species of revelation" (*Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge [London, 1895], I, 351-352).

⁸⁸ "On Christianity," VIII, 230.

⁸⁹ *Posthumous Works*, I, 238. It will be shown later that for De Quincey the moral nature is his "enjoying and suffering nature," that is, his feelings.

⁹⁰ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 56. In a passage in the "Rhetoric," De Quincey gives an admirably lucid statement of the difference between intuitive and discursive thought: "An *intuition* is any knowledge whatsoever,

It is to be noted that he regards the understanding heart as an "intellectual," or cognitive, organ. It is man's true intelligence. This being so, we may say that the *feelings*, as De Quincey uses the term, are not mere emotions: they are forms of impassioned thought, modes of awareness, felt intuitions. Keats used the word "sensation" to express a similar idea.

The organ or faculty by means of which man apprehends noumenal reality is not always called the "understanding heart." The "higher understanding" is another name that De Quincey gives to the mode of intelligence which transcends the limitations of the unimpassioned, discursive understanding. So far as can be judged from his ordinary allusions to it, the higher understanding is no different from the understanding heart. There is, however, a solitary passage (it occurs, strangely enough, in the same general context as the statement that the heart is man's great intuitive organ) in which he speaks of it as purely cognitive, as not impassioned in itself—although, in literature at any rate, it is always appealed to through the arousal of the feelings:

. . . [The literature of power] speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely, it may travel towards an object

sensuous or intellectual, which is apprehended *immediately*: a notion, on the other hand, or product of the discursive faculty, is any knowledge whatsoever which is apprehended *mediately*. All reasoning is carried on discursively; that is, *discurrendo*,—by running about to the right and the left, laying the separate notices together, and thence mediately deriving some third apprehension. Now, this process, however grand a characteristic of the human species as distinguished from the brute, is degrading to any supra-human intelligence, divine or angelic, by arguing limitation. God must not proceed by steps and the fragmentary knowledge of accretion; in which case at starting he has all the intermediate notices as so many bars between himself and the conclusion, and even at the penultimate or antepenultimate act he is still short of the truth. God must *see*; he must *intuit*, so to speak; and all truth must reach him simultaneously, first and last, without succession of time or partition of acts . . ." (X, 103). Nothing is said here of feeling as an agency of intuitive knowledge; intuitive knowledge does not appear to be necessarily impassioned in character. But may we not say that, according to De Quincey's conception, it is only through the agency of feeling that man shares, in some small degree, the nonlimitary intelligence, the mode of vision, attributed to the Deity? Surely the intuitions of the *heart* are impassioned.

seated in what Lord Bacon calls *dry light*; but, proximately, it does and must operate,—else it ceases to be a literature of *power*,—on and through that *humid light* which clothes itself in the mists and glittering iris of human passions, desires, and genial emotions.⁹¹

It is to be noted that De Quincey speaks here of the higher understanding or "reason." His use of the latter term would seem to suggest that he is, for the nonce, thinking in terms of the conception held by Coleridge and the German idealists according to which the reason is a faculty of intellectual intuition, "an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the universal, the eternal, and the necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent *phenomena*."⁹²

It is worth noting that De Quincey here speaks indecisively: it *may* happen, he says, that literature speaks ultimately to the higher understanding or reason; it *may* travel toward an object seated in dry light. Is it not plausible that the qualifying words signify less an indeterminateness of judgment as to the final appeal of literature than a doubting adherence at best to this concept of a dryly intellectual higher faculty? However that may be, the passage is unique, and inasmuch as we have found De Quincey to be hostile to a mysticism of the sort involved in romantic definitions of the reason, it seems proper to put it aside as unrepresentative of his thought. We should appear to be all the more justified in doing so because of the fact that his real concern in this context is not with the idea of the higher understanding but with the idea of power. Power is an affair of feeling, whether or not the intuitions of the higher understanding are such; and in this one place where the latter appear as existing in a dry light, they are referred to as occurring after the feelings have been aroused. Perhaps De Quincey is here thinking of the higher understanding as a calm eye whose very objects are the feelings that have been stirred, or as the relations of those feelings. Such a

⁹¹ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 54-55.

⁹² Coleridge, *The Friend*, in *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by W. G. T. Shedd (New York, 1853), II, 142.

conception makes the feelings essential to knowledge even though not constitutive of it.

But it is not profitable to push speculation any further on this point. It is not to be supposed that De Quincey possessed any real *theory* of the higher understanding or understanding heart. He distrusted obscure and fanciful explanations; he trusted the feelings without any explanations. That is the meaning of the statement that his mysticism was one of feeling and not one of the intellect. He contrived, as it were, to obtain the benefits of the conclusions of romantic metaphysics without subscribing to those conclusions in their full theoretical form. Yet it was inevitable that his faith in the feelings should verbalize itself to some extent in conceptual terms, terms which, as drawn from the traditional vocabulary of philosophy, could not be freed of certain theoretical implications.

Our discussion has been following the course of an analysis of the organ of impassioned intuition considered abstractly and with special reference to its intellectual or cognitive aspect. We can best obtain a more concrete notion of the faculty, and especially of the modes of feeling which are the vehicle of its intuitions, if we pass to an examination of the nature of that "infinite" which it apprehends. For De Quincey the infinite is the world of value—the universe of moral or spiritual experience.

De Quincey's accounts of the infinite are couched in a language of feeling rather than in one of logic. This is a natural enough consequence of his doctrine of the feelings as the sole agency by which the real is apprehended, but it makes serious difficulties for one who would submit his view to critical definition. One almost inevitably falls into the error of reading his poetical expressions as though they were precise and conceptual. There are really three vocabularies—all of them motive or poetical—in which De Quincey describes his intuitions of the infinite: they may be called the theological, the psychological, and the darkly mystical. The major conception expressed in all of them is that of mighty antagonist forces of good and evil, each of which exists by reason of

the other and which taken together constitute "the vision of life," that is, the world of value as it is revealed to man. On some occasions De Quincey starts with the positive or good force, and infers the negative or evil one; but ordinarily the movement of his thought is in the opposite direction, and he tends to take the ideas of sin, suffering, and the mysteriously dreadful as the key that unlocks the meaning of the infinite.

We quote first his most revelatory statement concerning the infinite as comprehended under the idea of sin. The word "sin," of course, as well as its antithesis "holiness," is from the theological vocabulary.

Sin is that secret word, that dark *aporréton* of the human race, undiscoverable except by express revelation, which having once been laid in the great things of God as a germinal principle, has since blossomed into a vast growth of sublime ideas known only to those nations who have lived under the moulding of Scriptural truth—and comprehending *all* functions of the Infinite operatively familiar to man. Yes, I affirm that there is no form through which the Infinite reveals itself in a sense comprehensible by man and adequate to man; that there is no sublime agency which *compresses* the human mind from infancy so as to mingle with the moments of its growth, positively none but has been in its whole origin—in every part—and exclusively developed out of that tremendous mystery which lurks under the name of sin.

Yes, I affirm that every Christian child is invested by an atmosphere of sublimity unknown to the greatest of Pagan philosophers . . . ⁹³

There is no theme to which De Quincey recurs more often than to this one that all manifestations of the infinite are rooted in the idea of sin, and that the idea of sin is the exclusive gift of Christianity. The Greeks and Romans, he tells us,

. . . had a clear conception of a moral ideal, as we have; but this they estimated by a reference to the will; and they called it virtue, and the antithesis they called vice. The *latcheté* or relaxed energy of the will, by which it yielded to the seductions of sensual pleasure, that was vice; and the braced-up tone by which it resisted these seductions was virtue. But the idea of holiness, and the antithetic idea of sin, as a violation of this awful and unimaginable sanctity, was so utterly undeveloped in the Pagan mind, that no word exists in classical Greek or classical Latin which approaches either pole of this synthesis . . . ⁹⁴

⁹³ *Posthumous Works*, I, 226-227.

⁹⁴ "Autobiography," II, 73.

Sin, we are told, is the violation of an awful and unimaginable sanctity, of "an ineffable standard of purity"; it is something vastly different from the failure of the will to cleave to a line of conduct determined by a rational ideal. The ideal of holiness is transcendental; it is comprehensible only to the feelings, the understanding heart; and it is revealed to the heart only by Christianity. De Quincey's ethic is not an ethic in the ordinary sense of the term; it is Christian moral mysticism.

That the moral life consists not in outward acts (except in so far as such acts are an expression of feelings or of thoughts tintured with feeling), but in the inward life of feeling itself, is apparent from the following:

. . . How feeble a conception must that man have of the infinity which lurks in a human spirit who can persuade himself that its total capacities of life are exhaustible by the few gross *acts* incident to social relations or open to human valuation! An act which may be necessarily limited and without opening for variety may involve a large variety of motives; motives again, meaning grounds of action that are distinctly recognized for such, may (numerically speaking) amount to nothing at all when compared with the absolutely infinite influxes of feeling or combinations of feeling that vary the thoughts of man; and the true internal *acts* of moral man are his thoughts, his yearnings, his aspirations, his sympathies or repulsions of heart. This is the life of man as it is appreciable by heavenly eyes . . . This is the infinite music that God only can read upon the vast harp of the human heart . . .

Now these thoughts, tintured subtly with the perfume and colouring of human affections, make up the sum of what merits *κατ' ἐξοχην* the name of life . . . ⁹⁵

Ultimately, we may say, De Quincey's world is a world not of ideas (as is the world of Plato), nor a world of the will (as is the world of Fichte), but a world of feeling; and feeling is moral. In other words, feeling is of the world of value.

The "will" is a term which De Quincey seldom employs. It is significant that when he speaks of "the total nature of man," he defines it as man's "enjoying and suffering nature" (the nature of the feelings) and man's "knowing and distinguishing nature." It does not occur to him to include the

⁹⁵ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 80-81.

will as a third element.⁹⁶ The freedom of the will is for him, in the final analysis, a freedom of the feelings, of the motives. This is made clear in an interesting note which S. H. Hodgson tells us he found in De Quincey's familiar hand "on the cover of a copy of Crombie on Philosophical Necessity":

Any reason which has reference to action, we call a motive. To act without a motive—*i.e.* without a reason—is (otherwise expressed) to act irrationally. Now all action in obedience to a motive the Necessarians call *necessity*: and to establish liberty, as against *them*, it would be required of us to establish a case of action without (or against) motives. The true liberty however . . . lies in this, that we by our own internal acts⁹⁷ *create* our own motives: those considerations, which to you or me are motives, to another are not so: and why? Because my reflexions upon the tendency of particular acts, or because my feelings connected with them, have given to certain considerations a weight which raises them into the strength and power of motives. Here lies our liberty. And to an obedience to motives thus created it is an easy artifice to give the name of necessity: but that creates no real necessity. The autonomy of Man is still secure.⁹⁸

We turn now from De Quincey's utterances on the mystery of the antagonist forces of good and evil as comprehended under the theological terms "sin" and "holiness," to passages in which he expresses the same fundamental concept in more purely psychological terms. Sin has the psychological concomitants of pain and sorrow, and the physical concomitant of death. The vision of life as comprehended in the profound relations of these to each other and to their antitheses is a mystery of which few persons have awareness:

Generally, that is, for a million against a unit, the awful mystery by which the fearful powers of death, and sorrow, and pain, and sin are locked into parts of a whole; so as, in fact, to be repetitions, reaffirmations of each other under a different phase—this is nothing, does not exist. Death sinks to a mere collective term—a category—a word of convenience for purposes of arrangement . . . Ah, mighty heaven, that such a mockery should cover the whole vision of life!⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Notes on "Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits*," XI, 382.

⁹⁷ It will be recalled that De Quincey has defined man's internal acts as his thoughts, yearnings, sympathies, and so forth, that is, as his feelings.

⁹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁹⁹ *Posthumous Works*, I, 229.

The phrase "vision of life" is used as the title of one of the short pieces in the "Suspiria de Profundis," and it is in that piece that we have the clearest statement of the idea of the great antagonist forces. The terminology here is that which we have chosen to call psychological, with an intermixture of such words as "dread" and "horror," which belong to what we have designated as the vocabulary of the darkly mystical, or the "dark sublime."¹⁰⁰

Upon me, as upon others scattered thinly by tens and twenties over every thousand years, fell too powerfully and too early the vision of life. The horror of life mixed itself already in earliest youth with the heavenly sweetness of life Is this the description of an early youth passed in the shades of gloom? No; but of a youth passed in the divinest happiness. And, if the reader has (which so few have) the passion without which there is no reading of the legend and superscription upon man's brow, if he is not (as most are) deafer than the grave to every *deep* note that sighs upwards from the Delphic caves of human life, he will know that the rapture of life . . . does not arise, unless as perfect music arises . . . by the confluence of the mighty and terrific discords with the subtle concords. Not by contrast, or as reciprocal foils, do these elements act,—which is the feeble conception of many,—but by union.

. . . without a basis of the dreadful there is no perfect rapture. It is in part through the sorrow of life, growing out of dark events, that this basis of awe and solemn darkness slowly accumulates But, as life expands, it is more through the *strife* which besets us, strife from conflicting opinions, positions, passions, interests, that the funereal ground settles and deposits itself which sends upward the dark lustrous brilliancy through the jewel of life, else revealing a pale and superficial glitter. Either the human being must suffer and struggle, as the price of a more searching vision, or his gaze must be shallow and without intellectual revelation.¹⁰¹

"Suffering" and "rapture" are terms that link themselves with the greatest directness to the life of the feelings, and in equating the ideas they stand for with life itself De Quincey is giving us in this passage a direct statement that his world is primarily a world of feeling.

The "Suspiria," generally, constitutes De Quincey's most lyrical utterance, and the pieces are one sustained comment

¹⁰⁰ Further comment upon the mystery of evil as it appears under the concept of the "dark sublime" will be reserved until our discussion of the sublime in Chapter III.

¹⁰¹ XIII, 350-351.

upon his preoccupation with the ideas of suffering and strife, not only as concomitants of man's sinful nature but as great educative forces, forces revealing reality. This concept is dramatized in "Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow." The education of Levana is effected not by the "poor machinery that moves by spelling-books and grammars," which is to say, not by the instruction of the mere understanding, but by "that mighty system of central forces hidden in the deep bosom of human life, which by passion, by strife, by temptation, by the energies of resistance, works for ever upon children"—and all mankind.¹⁰²

Such is the view that De Quincey gives us of the infinite, or reality. We are now in a better position to appreciate his concept of feeling as the agency of truth—so long as we grant his definition of truth as knowledge of the world of value. Surely all will agree that values can be adequately comprehended only by feeling, by realization. That they reside in what is ultimately real must remain a matter of faith in any Kantian view, and it does so remain for De Quincey on the speculative level—that is to say, on the level on which the understanding and the speculative reason are accepted as the instruments of what we call knowledge. De Quincey's entire system of ultimate beliefs may be regarded, on the basis of reason, as no more than a development or an elaboration of the license which the practical reason grants to faith. His position differs from Kant's in that his conception of the moral life (which supplies the data for the practical reason) is different. He differs also in that being more profoundly a man of feeling than is Kant he is not content to accept speculative knowledge as primary. But the truth given by the understanding heart is not the same truth as that which is denied to the reason. The understanding heart does not dissipate mystery—it realizes it.

V. DE QUINCEY'S VIEW OF NATURE

What, for De Quincey, is the relation between the phenomenal world of nature and the noumenal world, which,

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 363.

as revealed to man through the agency of the understanding heart, is seen to be a world of spiritual values? De Quincey has vouchsafed us only a few direct hints as to his theory of nature, and these are not entirely consistent in their suggestions. It will be well to quote in full his most revealing passage, which occurs in the chapter on Charles Lloyd in the "Lake Reminiscences":

... often and often, in years after all was gone, I have passed old Brathay, or have gone over purposely after dark, about the time when, for many a year, I used to go over to spend the evening; and, seating myself on a stone, by the side of the mountain river Brathay, have staid for hours listening to the same sound to which so often Charles Lloyd and I used to hearken together with profound emotion and awe—the sound of pealing anthems, as if streaming from the open portals of some illimitable cathedral; for such a sound does actually arise, in many states of the weather, from the peculiar actions of the river Brathay upon its rocky bed; and many times I have heard it, of a quiet night, when no stranger could have been persuaded to believe it other than the sound of choral chanting—distinct, solemn, saintly. Its meaning and expression were, in those earlier years, uncertain and general; not more pointed or determined in the direction which it impressed upon one's feelings than the light of setting suns: and sweeping, in fact, the whole harp of pensive sensibilities, rather than striking the chord of any one specific sentiment. But since the ruin or dispersion of that household, after the smoke had ceased to ascend from their hearth, or the garden walks to re-echo their voices, oftentimes, when lying by the river side, I have listened to the same aerial saintly sound, whilst looking back to that night, long hidden in the frost of receding years, when Charles and Sophia Lloyd, now lying in foreign graves, first dawned upon me, coming suddenly out of rain and darkness; then—young, rich, happy, full of hope, belted with young children (of whom also most are long dead), and standing apparently on the verge of a labyrinth of golden hours. Musing on that night in November, 1807, and then upon the wreck that had been wrought by a space of fifteen years, I would say to myself sometimes, and seem to hear it in the songs of this watery cathedral—Put not your trust in any fabric of happiness that has its root in man or the children of men. Sometimes even I was tempted to discover in the same music a sound such as this—Love nothing, love nobody, for thereby comes a killing curse in the rear. But sometimes also, very early on a summer morning, when the dawn was barely beginning to break, all things locked in sleep, and only some uneasy murmur or cock-crow, at a faint distance, giving a hint of resurrection for earth and her generations, I have heard in that same chanting of the little mountain river a more solemn if a less agitated ad-

monition—a requiem over departed happiness, and a protestation against the thought that so many excellent creatures, but a little lower than the angels, whom I have seen only to love in this life—so many of the good, the brave, the beautiful, the wise—can have appeared for no higher purpose or prospect than simply to point a moral, to cause a little joy and many tears, a few perishing moons of happiness and years of vain regret! No! that the destiny of man is more in correspondence with the grandeur of his endowments, and that our own mysterious tendencies are written hieroglyphically in the vicissitudes of day and night, of winter and summer, and throughout the great alphabet of Nature!

The passage closes with the important statement we have noticed before: "But on that theme—beware, reader! Listen to no *intellectual* argument. One argument there is, one only there is, of philosophic value: an argument drawn from the *moral* nature of man: an argument of Immanuel Kant's. The rest are dust and ashes."¹⁰⁸

The essential things here would seem to be as follows: (1) De Quincey and his friend Lloyd were moved to a feeling of awe by the fashion in which the mountain river simulated the sound of pealing anthems, but no definite thoughts associated themselves with the effect. Their moral sensibilities were stirred, but in an indefinite way. (2) Years later, the same river music took on a content of definite meanings for De Quincey. First, there was the meaning that one should not identify one's happiness with anything human, or even love any person or any thing. This meaning would seem to have been read into the sound of the water as a result of De Quincey's reflections on the contrast between the constancy of nature and the mutability of human life. Secondly, there was an almost opposite meaning: there was the thought of immortality, as suggested by the very constancy of nature and by the diurnal resurrection of the sleeping world. This gave rise to the more general idea that the meanings of man's life are symbolized by the objects and processes of the phenomenal world. (3) But De Quincey is persuaded of the impossibility of any logical proof that the apparent purposiveness of nature is real and that it mirrors

forth and attests the reality of human values. The only argument of philosophic value is Kant's argument of the practical reason: man's experience of the moral life entitles him to faith in the reality of God, and the belief in God leads to a teleological interpretation of nature.¹⁰⁴ Thus, on the basis of religious faith, nature may be regarded as an alphabet of spiritual meanings.

But in precisely what way or ways are we to read this alphabet? It is one thing to take the functional arrangements and processes of nature as indicative of relationships in the world of value; it is quite another to attach specific meanings to particular phenomena as a result of their influence on the feelings. The geologist, let us say, because he finds in the characteristics of the river Brathay a record of orderly change and functional adaptation, may take the river as a symbol of corresponding design in the life of man. But the poet has an immediate experience of awe when listening to the sounds of the river, and he finds a symbolic meaning in the likeness of those sounds to anthem music. The scientist, in other words, makes a judgment of purpose; the poet makes an aesthetic judgment and interprets it to mean certain things.¹⁰⁵

Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement*, defines both types of judgments and assigns a significance to each, although he

¹⁰⁴ John Watson, in the introductory chapter of his work *Schelling's Transcendental Idealism* (Chicago, 1892), explains the Kantian position thus: ". . . having established the existence of a Supreme Being, we can now determine with certainty that which to reason in its speculative aspect was at best problematical. The world of nature as ruled over by a single Supreme Being must be viewed as in some sense a manifestation of Infinite Intelligence, and hence as adapted to the realization of our moral nature. Accordingly the study of nature tends to assume the form of a teleological system in which all things are adapted to one supreme end. True, we cannot say that we comprehend the nature of God absolutely as he is, or that we are abstractly right in conceiving of nature as a system adapted to ends, but we are entitled to make the nature of God intelligible to ourselves by analogies drawn from the world of experience, and practically to view all things as forming a system presided over by an all-wise, all-perfect and all-powerful Being. The world of sense thus becomes for us a "sensuous symbol" of that higher world which is half-revealed and half-concealed from us" (p. 26).

¹⁰⁵ See *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, translated by J. H. Bernard (2d ed.; London, 1914), Kant's Introduction, vii-ix; Part II, Div. I.

is exceedingly tentative in his suggestions as to the metaphysical significance of aesthetic judgments and does not discuss them in terms of specific symbolisms. De Quincey fails to define the types, but both are present in his thought, sometimes, it would appear, in a confused fashion. It has been stated in a preceding section that he makes no comment on Kant's third Critique. Had he done so, we should be on more solid ground in our attempt to state his theory of nature.

In a comparison of the works of Shakespeare with the works of nature De Quincey states that the latter

. . . are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert, but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!¹⁰⁶

But ordinarily, when he speaks of nature, it is to refer not to evidences of functional design, but rather to the effects upon the feelings of some phenomenon or combination of phenomena regarded not at all in the light of functional adaptation of parts or of wholes. It is, in short, to an aesthetic effect—usually to an effect of the sublime. And he is often given to interpreting these effects as resting upon—or, shall we say, as giving rise to—highly specific symbolizations. Thus the abysses of space (and time) are symbolical of abysses within the world of values:

Great is the mystery of Space, greater is the mystery of Time. Either mystery grows upon man as man himself grows; and either seems to be a function of the godlike which is in man. In reality, the depths and the heights which are in man, the depths by which he searches, the heights by which he aspires, are but projected and made objective externally in the three dimensions of space which are outside of him. He trembles at the abyss into which his bodily eyes look down, or look up; not knowing that abyss to be, not always consciously suspecting it to be, but by an instinct written in his prophetic heart feeling it to be, boding it to be, fearing it to be, and sometimes hoping it to be, the mirror to a mightier abyss that will one day be expanded in himself.¹⁰⁷

The depth to which Lord Rosse's telescope shows the Great

¹⁰⁶ "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," X, 394.

¹⁰⁷ "System of the Heavens," VIII, 15.

Nebula of Orion to be "sunk in the abysses of the heavenly wilderness"¹⁰⁸ is affecting to the mind because it makes real to the imagination the infinities of the world of moral feeling.

It is interesting to consider a special effect which De Quincey reads into the configuration of this nebula. It is not alone for its immense distance from us or for its great size that he considers the Orion nebula to be the sublimest of objects. He discovers in its outline "a head thrown back, and raising its face . . . in the very anguish of hatred to some unknown heavens. . . . Brutalities unspeakable sit upon the upper lip, . . . a convolute of cruelty and revenge" upon the lower lip of this "regal phantasma."¹⁰⁹ It thus becomes a symbol of evil in the moral universe.

In a footnote in which De Quincey replies to "various dissenting opinions" concerning this apparition, he makes clear that he does not regard it as necessary that all persons interpret alike the vaguer or more arbitrary appearances of nature:¹¹⁰ "All such appearances, whether seen in the fire, or in the clouds, or in the arbitrary combinations of the stars, are read differently by different people."¹¹¹ Furthermore, "the earliest revelation of this nebular apparition by Lord Rosse's telescope has . . . been greatly modified" (by the application of increased optical power).

. . . [But] What of *that*? Who doubts that it would be modified? It is enough that once, in a single stage of the examination, this apparition put on the figure here represented, and for a momentary purpose here dimly deciphered. Take Wordsworth's fine sonnet upon cloud mimics . . . would it have been any rational objection to these grand pictures that the whole had vanished within the hour? He who fancies *that* does not understand the original purpose in holding up a mirror of description to appearances so grand, and in a dim sense often so symbolic.¹¹²

Has De Quincey a *theory* of the symbolism—whatever be

¹⁰⁸ "System of the Heavens," VIII, 18.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

¹¹⁰ This is not to imply that he thinks the more definite and fixed phenomena must be read alike by all—but that is a point not broached in the footnote.

¹¹¹ "System of the Heavens," VIII, 19 n.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

its degree of dimness—of objects in nature which appeal to our aesthetic sense? Our answer to this question must follow from the examination of several more or less puzzling pronouncements. The first is a fragment¹¹³ which Japp gives us in the *Posthumous Works*:

Of all eradications of this doctrine (of human progress), the most difficult is that connected with the outward shows—in air, in colouring, in form, in grouping of the great elements composing the furniture of the heavens and the earth.¹¹⁴ It is most difficult, even when confining one's attention to the modern case, and neglecting the comparison with the ancient, at all to assign the analysis of those steps by which to us Christians (but never before) the sea and the sky and the clouds and the many inter-modifications of these, A, B, C, D, and again the many interactions of the whole, the sun (S.), the moon (M.), the noon (N.S.)—the breathless, silent noon—the gay afternoon—the solemn glory of sunset—the dove-like glimpse of Paradise in the tender light of early dawn—by which these obtain a power utterly unknown, undreamed of, unintelligible to a Pagan. If we had spoken to Plato—to Cicero—of the deep pathos in a sunset, would he—would either—have gone along with us? The foolish reader thinks, Why, perhaps not, not altogether as to the quantity—the degree of emotion. Doubtless, it is undeniable that we moderns have far more sensibility to the phenomena and visual glories of this world which we inhabit. And it is possible that, reflecting on the singularity of this characteristic badge worn by modern civilization, he may go so far as to suspect that Christianity has had something to do with it. But, on seeking to complete the chain which connects them, he finds himself quite unable to recover the principal link.

Now, it will prove, after all, even for myself who have exposed and revealed these new ligatures by which Christianity connects man with awful interests in the world,¹¹⁵ a most insurmountable task to assign the total nidus in which this new power resides, or the total phenomenology through which that passes to and fro. Generally it seems to stand thus: God reveals Himself to us more or less dimly in vast numbers of processes; for example, in those of vegetation, animal growth, crystallization, etc. These impress us not primarily, but secondarily on reflection, after considering the enormity of changes worked annually, and

¹¹³ Like most of the other "Brevia" this was intended as a note for De Quincey's own use.

¹¹⁴ The meaning of the first sentence is obscure. 'Is it that changes due to Christianity are not to be reckoned as examples of human progress?'

¹¹⁵ De Quincey often sets forth the claim of being the first to call attention to the fashion in which Christianity explains numerous aspects of the modern mind as opposed to the ancient.

working even at the moment we speak. Then again, other arrangements throw us more powerfully upon the moral qualities of God; e.g., we see the fence, the shell, the covering varied in ten million ways, by which in buds and blossoms He insures the ultimate protection of the fruit. What protection, analogous to this, has He established for animals; or, taking up the question in the ideal case, for man, the supreme of His creatures? We perceive that He has relied upon love, upon love strengthened to the adamantine force of insanity or delirium by the mere aspect of utter, utter helplessness in the human infant. It is not by power, by means visibly developed, that this result is secured, but by means spiritual and "transcendental" in the highest degree.¹¹⁶

In the first of these paragraphs De Quincey is speaking specifically of aesthetic effects—of the power which the beauty of natural phenomena has over our feelings.¹¹⁷ He begins the second paragraph with the significant confession that it is an insurmountable task "to assign the total nidus in which this new power resides," and then proceeds to hazard the general statement that the Christian is able to discern God as God reveals himself in vast numbers of processes and protective arrangements. De Quincey seems to imply that the revelations through processes differ from the revelations through protective arrangements in that the former impress us only "secondarily after reflection," whereas the latter (this would seem to be his meaning) impress us immediately. However this may be—and one would like to argue the point with him—he is offering the teleological judgments which we make as an explanation of the aesthetic judgments.¹¹⁸

But how is the discernment of purposiveness related to our aesthetic experience? Does De Quincey mean that nature's beauty exists for us and moves our feelings only if we stop to reflect upon the processes and arrangements of nature generally? Does he perhaps mean that beauty is perceived only as a result of our past reflections? Does he mean that teleological evidences assure us of a hidden correspondence

¹¹⁶ *Posthumous Works*, I, 190–192.

¹¹⁷ The symbolism involved appears to be of the general rather than the highly specific kind.

¹¹⁸ It cannot be thought that he is identifying the two. If the reasons for this statement are not already apparent they will become so as we proceed. In any event, we shall discover in Chapter III that De Quincey expressly denies purposiveness to the beautiful and the sublime.

of harmony between nature and ourselves, and that with the idea of such correspondence in mind we become able to discover secret symbols of this harmony (different from teleological symbols) in various phenomena as perceived immediately? It is impossible to say what De Quincey has in mind, and guesses would carry us beyond what we can be justified in defining as his view. Certainly this fragment affords no clear idea as to why a particular phenomenon (such as the sunset) gives rise to a particular feeling or meaning (such as sadness).

We next examine a passage from the chapter on Coleridge in the "Literary Reminiscences":

. . . In solitude, and chiefly in the solitudes of nature, and, above all, amongst the great and *enduring* features of nature, such as mountains, and quiet cells, and the lawny recesses of forests, and the silent shores of lakes, features with which (as being themselves less liable to change) our feelings have a more abiding association—under these circumstances it is that . . . evanescent hauntings of our past and forgotten selves are most apt to startle and waylay us. These are *positive* torments from which the agitated mind shrinks in fear; but there are others *negative* in their nature—that is, blank mementoes of powers extinct, and of faculties burnt out within us. And from both forms of anguish—from this twofold scourge—poor Coleridge fled, perhaps, in flying from the beauty of external nature. In alluding to this latter, or negative form of suffering . . . Coleridge himself most beautifully insists upon and illustrates the truth that all which we find in Nature must be created by ourselves; and that alike whether Nature is so gorgeous in her beauty as to seem apparelled in her wedding-garment or so powerless and extinct as to seem pallid in her shroud. In either case,

"O, Lady, we receive but what we give,
And in *our* life alone does nature *live*;
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud.

It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from *outward* forms to win
The passion and the life whose fountains are *within*."¹¹⁹

What does De Quincey have in mind when he echoes Coleridge to the effect that "all which we find in Nature must be created by ourselves"? In answering this question we can-

not rely entirely upon what Coleridge himself meant;¹²⁰ for, as we have seen, De Quincey's metaphysics are different from Coleridge's. But it seems clear enough that in this context De Quincey is not thinking of teleological evidences (of structural and functional arrangement) which the mind discovers in nature and accepts on faith, but rather of the effects, particularly the aesthetic effects, which nature as perceived immediately has upon our feelings. These he here asserts to be "created by ourselves," that is, projected from within our own minds; and he appears to suggest that our past associations with particular phenomena have a great deal to do with the meanings that we create.

But this does not carry us much forward. What lies behind our ability to find suitable symbols in nature for our feelings? The principle of association can hardly explain everything. Some forms of nature excite our feelings upon our first perception of them, not merely upon repetitions of the experience. It may well be that they serve only as catalytic agents which precipitate the combinations of feelings that already exist potentially in our minds, but the catalysis can hardly be explained as merely accidental. Must we not, in the final analysis, resort to the view that natural phenomena can serve as symbols only because there is an underlying harmony between our life and the system of nature—a harmony that is evidenced by our ability to interpret nature teleologically on the basis of faith in God? Again we ask, is not De Quincey hinting at some such explanation when he ascribes to Christianity the sensibility of the modern mind to feelings induced by "the furniture of the heavens and the

¹²⁰ Coleridge's view of the life in nature is too large and difficult a subject for analysis here. It has been most penetratingly dealt with in recent literature by I. A. Richards in his *Coleridge on Imagination* (New York, 1935), and it is Richards' conclusion that Coleridge adhered at different times—or sometimes in ambiguous fashion at the same time—to the apparently contradictory doctrines (1) that "man, through Nature, is linked with something other than himself which he perceives through her" and (2) that man makes of nature, "as with a mirror, a transformed image of his own being," doctrines which Richards calls the "realist" and the "projective" and which he believes can be reconciled in terms of "a fuller description of the 'facts of mind' from which the poet and the philosopher alike set out" (pp. 145-146, 162).

earth"? But, so far as the passage last examined is concerned, we are left to suppose that the specific meanings drawn from aesthetic judgments of nature are purely subjective, being determined by past associations and our own states of mind. This would explain the variation between the meanings drawn by different individuals, but, except on the basis of a common fund of association, it would not seem to explain the common elements.

We examine now, however, a passage in the "Autobiography" which appears to contradict the statement that the feelings induced by nature are in reality projected by ourselves. De Quincey speaks of childhood as a season of life in which the heart—the understanding heart—is apprehensive, and therefore endowed "with a special power of listening for the tones of truth—hidden, struggling, or remote." He then continues:

That mighty silence which infancy is thus privileged by nature and by position to enjoy, co-operates with another source of power—almost peculiar to youth and youthful circumstances—which Wordsworth also was the first person to notice. It belongs to a profound experience of the relations subsisting between ourselves and nature—that not always are we called upon to seek; sometimes, and in childhood above all, we are sought.

"Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing *of itself* will come,
But we must still be seeking?"

And again—

"Nor less I deem that there are pow'rs
Which *of themselves* our minds impress;
And we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness."

These cases of infancy, reached at intervals by special revelations, or creating for itself, through its privileged silence of heart, authentic whispers of truth, or beauty, or power, have some analogy to those other cases, more directly supernatural, in which (according to the old traditional faith of our ancestors) deep messages of admonition reached an individual through sudden angular deflexions of words, uttered or written, that had not been originally addressed to himself.¹²¹

¹²¹ I, 122.

Here not all that the child finds in nature is created by himself. Meanings, it would appear, reside in nature, and of themselves impress the mind. It seems impossible to deny the conflict in thought between this passage, which takes its inspiration from Wordsworth, and the passage which illustrates its meaning by reference to and quotation from Coleridge.

If De Quincey had possessed a speculative metaphysics—or if we had sure ground for believing that he both understood and adhered to Coleridge's view of the imagination—we might seek to reconcile the conflict by some such explanation as the one which I. A. Richards elaborates in his explanation of the similar conflict in Coleridge's thought.¹²² But it seems unsafe to speculate further on such fragmentary data. One can say simply that De Quincey's ideas on the way in which nature speaks to man are not clear, and that at some moments he is willing to go further than at others in attributing nature's suggestions to nature itself. We may say also that his instinctive tendency is to accept nature naïvely as a real system of sensuous symbols, but that he is unable to defend this tendency successfully on philosophical grounds. Wordsworth introduced him to certain ways of experiencing nature emotionally and to the habit of regarding these experiences as revelations of spiritual meanings. But, as he does not adhere to any one specific phase of romantic metaphysics, De Quincey is baffled when it comes to explaining the validity of these revelations.

There is but one more utterance of De Quincey's on the subject of the relations between ourselves and nature to be examined, and it is one that suggests a point of view radically different from any that has appeared so far. The fact has been noted in a preceding section that in his youth De Quincey played with the idea of retiring to "the woods of Lower Canada" for philosophical study. He thus explains his one-time motive:

. . . in England, and in all moderate climates, we are too slightly reminded of nature or the forces of nature. Great heats, or great colds

¹²² See *supra*, p. 62, note 120.

(and in Canada there are both), or great hurricanes, as in the West Indian latitudes, recall us continually to the sense of a powerful presence, investing our paths on every side; whereas in England it is possible to forget that we live amongst greater agencies than those of men and human institutions.¹²³

Here there is a conception not of mere symbols or hieroglyphics, but a spiritual presence in nature. This idea may be presumed to have been planted in his thought by the poetry of Wordsworth. But that he consistently held such a conception does not appear to be supported by the facts of De Quincey's philosophical position as they have been defined, and he can hardly be thought to have entertained it in any other way than as a poetic fiction, which is to say that he regarded it as in all respects a creation of the mind. Such an interpretation is corroborated by the tone of his reference in another context to Wordsworth's "early Spinosistic feeling . . . of a mysterious presence diffused through the solitudes of woods."¹²⁴

Our analysis has given us every reason for believing that De Quincey does not look upon nature as one with mind, or, with Schelling, as an unconscious form of mind. If nature is indeed an alphabet of spiritual meanings it is so not because it is itself spirit, but rather because it is arranged and controlled by the Supreme Spirit—God—and symbolizes the workings of that Spirit. De Quincey appears to hold to a fundamental dualism (a Christian dualism) of matter and spirit, of appearance and reality, and the true infinity of nature lies for him in the complexity and mystery of its symbolizations, not in an identification with the real.

We may conclude that De Quincey's lack of a speculative metaphysics accounts for his failure to offer any real explanation of the hieroglyphics he was wont to see in nature, and therefore of his inability to maintain more than a very partial and inconstant faith in their objectivity. But if they are to be interpreted as purely subjective, the problem still remains of why the universe so conveniently supplies the materials

¹²³ "Autobiography," II, 108.

¹²⁴ "Literary Reminiscences," II, 261.

for such symbols. At any rate, the symbols were important to De Quincey, and he gives full reign to his tendency to view "the least things in the universe as mirrors to the greatest"—to finding Our Ladies of Sorrow uttering their pleasure "not by sounds that perish, or by words that go astray, but by signs in heaven, by changes on earth, by pulses in secret rivers, heraldries painted on darkness, and hieroglyphics written on the tablets of the brain."¹²⁵ Indeed he carries the penchant so far, and so persistently tends to read purely fantastic elements into whatever of objective meaning may be supposed to exist in the aesthetic perception of nature, that one is often prompted to dismiss the philosophical problem involved.

It is worth remarking that De Quincey's view of nature's hieroglyphic meanings is a more flexible one than Wordsworth's view of nature as embodying or symbolizing a divine presence. Aldous Huxley has written of the difficulties Wordsworth would have encountered had he been forced to apply his conception to nature as it is experienced in the tropics, where it so often seems alien and sinister.¹²⁶ De Quincey's view of nature as a system of hieroglyphics can take care of the diabolical suggestions as easily as of the beneficent and divine. Both are subsumed under a scheme of moral values. Through darkness and sin, light and holiness are made real.

¹²⁵ "Suspiria de Profundis," XIII, 365.

¹²⁶ "Wordsworth in the Tropics," *Yale Review*, XVIII (1929), 672-683.

CHAPTER III

General Aesthetic

I. THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: TERMS AND MODES

DE QUINCEY'S general aesthetic must, for the most part, be formulated in terms of deductions from his theory of literature, since his direct pronouncements on the nature of the beautiful and of the fine arts are few and brief; but in the present chapter it will serve the purpose of our investigation to piece together, as a setting for our examination of his theory of literature, such comment as exists on matters of aesthetic theory.

"Beauty" and "the beautiful" are terms of only secondary importance in De Quincey's philosophical vocabulary, but they are employed in two senses: a general sense and a specific. In the first they are identified with the aesthetic experience in its wider application; in the second they refer to a particular effect, distinct from, but parallel to, the effects of the picturesque and the sublime. The reason that the terms do not find frequent use in their general sense is that De Quincey ordinarily employs the term "power" in their stead, the conception of power being his *prevailing* one of the aesthetic experience, at least in so far as literature is concerned. "Power" is his key term, as "beauty" is Keats's. The reason that the terms are not often used in their specific sense is that beauty as a distinct effect is less important in his experience and thought—outside, that is to say, of his regard for the beauty of style or form—than the effect of the sublime. The sublime, in other words, is the primary vehicle of power.

De Quincey is using the word "beauty" in its larger sense when he states that literature in common with the other arts "educates . . . deep sympathies with mysterious ideals of beauty."¹ Other examples of the general use of the word occur in the "Postscript on Didactic Poetry" which he appends to his translation of the *Laocoon*.² The point of the "Postscript" is that Virgil did not describe a breeding cow in his *Georgics*, as Lessing asserts that he did, for the "plain prosaic purpose of rectifying our practical judgments in this matter."³ The purpose of a poet in writing so-called "didactic" poetry is not to instruct, but "to win the beauty of art from a subject in itself unpromising or repulsive":⁴

. . . Beauty . . . exists everywhere to the eye which is capable of detecting it; and it is our right, and duty indeed, to adapt ourselves to this ordinance of nature, by pursuing and unveiling it even under a cloud of deformity For meanness and deformity even . . . have their modes of beauty.⁵

De Quincey proceeds to define these "modes of beauty" by offering four reasons why Virgil may have described the cow: (1) ". . . as a *difficult* and intractable subject, by way of a *bravura*, or passage of execution," (2) as a familiar subject, (3) as an ideal, (4) as an object beautiful in its utility.⁶ We shall revert to these four possibilities in our discussion of the specific effects.

A. THE PICTURESQUE

In distinguishing between the beautiful and the sublime as separate aesthetic categories, De Quincey is following a tradition that began with Addison⁷ and that culminated in Burke's and Kant's definitions of the sublime; in insisting

¹ "Oliver Goldsmith," IV, 309.

² XI, 215-221.

³ "Lessing's *Laocoon*," XI, 214.

⁴ "Postscript on Didactic Poetry," XI, 216.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-220.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁷ Particularly in his essays on the imagination in *The Spectator*, Nos. 411-421. "The distinction of first establishing the sublime as a separate category, is due to Addison, although he may not have realized the significance of what he had done" (Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* [New York, 1935], p. 54).

upon the recognition of the picturesque as a third effect, he is lending his authority to a newer distinction. According to the *New English Dictionary*, Price's *Essay on the Picturesque as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1794) marks the first employment, absolutely as a substantive, of the word "picturesque."

De Quincey's definition of the picturesque is given in a footnote in the "Lake Reminiscences." He has described Dove Cottage as lovely (that is, beautiful) rather than picturesque, its outline and proportion, its windows and chimneys not being "sufficiently marked and effective for the picturesque." The footnote reads:

The idea of the picturesque is one which did not exist at all until the post-Christian ages; neither amongst the Grecians nor amongst the Romans; and *therefore*, as respects one reason, it was, that the art of landscape painting did not exist (except in a Chinese infancy, and as a mere trick of inventive ingenuity) amongst the finest artists of Greece.⁸ What *is* picturesque, as placed in relation to the beautiful and the sublime? It is (to define it by the very shortest form of words) the characteristic pushed into a sensible excess. The prevailing character of any natural object, no matter how little attractive it may be for beauty, is always interesting for itself, as the character and hieroglyphic symbol of the purposes pursued by Nature in the determination of its form, style of motion, texture of superficies, relation of parts, &c. Thus, for example, an expression of dulness and somnolent torpor does not ally itself with grace or elegance; but, in combination with strength and other qualities, it may compose a character of serviceable and patient endurance, as in the cart-horse, having unity in itself, and tending to one class of uses sufficient to mark it out by circumscription for a distinct and separate contemplation. Now, in combination with certain counteracting circumstances, as with the momentary energy of some great effort, much of this peculiar character might be lost, or defeated, or dissipated. On that account, the skilful observer will seek out circumstances that are in harmony with the principal tendencies and assist them; such, suppose, as a state of lazy relaxation from labour, and the fall of heavy drenching rain causing the head to droop, and the shaggy mane, together with the fetlocks, to weep. These, and other circumstances of attitude, &c., bring out the character of prevailing tendency of the animal in some excess; and, in such a case, we call the resulting ef-

⁸ This is an idea which De Quincey insists upon in various contexts. See "The Caesars," VI, 290; "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 308-309.

fect to the eye—picturesque: or in fact, *characteresque*. In extending this speculation to objects of art and human purposes, there is something more required of subtle investigation. Meantime, it is evident that neither the sublime nor the beautiful depends upon any *secondary* interest of a purpose or of a character expressing that purpose. They (confining the case to visual objects) court the *primary* interest involved in that (form, colour, texture, attitude, motion) which forces admiration, which fascinates the eye, for itself, and without a question of any distinct purpose: and, instead of character—that is, discriminating and separating expression, tending to the special and the individual—they both agree in pursuing the Catholic, the Normal, the Ideal.⁹

De Quincey's idea of the picturesque as an effect distinct from the beautiful evidently takes its rise from his recognition of the fact that an object may be interesting to contemplate even though its formal aspects ("form, colour, texture, attitude, motion") do not delight the eye for their own sake. But if the form of the picturesque is not attractive intrinsically, what is the source of its appeal? De Quincey assigns it to our interest in the fashion in which the aspects of form coöperate to bring out the essential character of the object. Character is interesting for its own sake, as suggestive of nature's purposes.

Had De Quincey been content with the statement that the picturesque is concerned with individual character, whereas the beautiful and the sublime are not, his conception would have been clearer in our minds than it is, in view of his added remarks about character as the expression of purpose. Whenever he introduces his favorite notion of hieroglyphic symbols, his meaning is puzzling.

"Distinct purpose," he implies, is always suggested in the picturesque. The purpose *is* distinct in the illustration of the cart horse. But what purposes are expressed by "characteresque" mountain landscapes?¹⁰ Is it merely to be as-

⁹ II, 360-361.

¹⁰ It is clear enough that such landscapes, and not merely those which have been subdued to the uses of man, are picturesque to De Quincey, for he speaks of the prevailing character of *any* natural object as suitable material for the picturesque, and, in writing of Wordsworth, he refers to fields of thought which Wordsworth seemed to think locked up and sacred to himself, one of them being "the whole theory of picturesque beauty, as presented to

sumed that every characteristic effect in nature exists for some good reason? fulfils some function within the economy of the whole? It is difficult to see what further idea De Quincey can have in mind. Yet, in so far as the apperception of purpose is involved in the experience of the picturesque, there would seem to be a real difference in the character of the experiences in regard to the cart horse and the mountain landscape, since a distinct purpose is *divined* in the one and not in the other.

De Quincey tells us that something more of "subtle investigation" would be required to extend his theory of the picturesque to objects of art and human purposes. This he nowhere performs for us. But as a matter of fact, the idea of the picturesque as involving expression of a distinct purpose is more easily understandable when applied to such objects than when applied to purely natural ones. In one place and another De Quincey does give illustrations of the picturesque in artificial objects and in art. Thus he surmises that the Rome of Nero's day, with its narrow winding streets and its many buildings of wood, was in all probability a picturesque city, although the Romans were not sensitive to the effect.¹¹ He tells us that throughout the Lake District in England, and especially at Hawkeshead, "the rare works of man . . . were hoar with the grey tints of an antique picturesque."¹² He asserts that the Glasgow Observatory, by reason of its position on the heights, above the confusion and roar and misery of the city, is "*picturesque* to a higher organ than the eye—viz. to the human heart."¹³ As examples of the picturesque in art he cites the works of Chaucer:

. . . Rightly did a critic of the 17th century pronounce Chaucer a miracle of natural genius, as having "taken into the compass of his

our notice at every minute by the bold mountainous scenery amongst which we lived, and as it happened to be modified by the seasons of the year, by the time of day, or by the accidents of light and shade" ("London Reminiscences," III, 198).

¹¹ "The Caesars," VI, 290.

¹² "Literary Reminiscences," II, 262.

¹³ "System of the Heavens," VIII, 27. De Quincey might have denominated the effect in this case the "moral picturesque," as being parallel to his category of the "moral sublime."

Canterbury Tales the various manners and humours of the whole English nation in his age: not a single character has escaped him The matter and manner of these tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humours, and calling, that each of them would be improper in any other mouth."¹⁴

In all these examples it is possible to discern the characteristic as pushed into a sensible excess, and, furthermore, to grant that the individuality of character is somehow expressive of function.

It would seem to be implicit in De Quincey's definition that a picturesque object is more or less *familiar*, or, better, that it throws into relief the elements of a character that is familiar. Surely in the case of an absolutely novel object there would exist no basis for the judgment that the characteristic was being brought out in some excess. It will be remembered that one of the modes of beauty which Virgil may have sought to win from his unpromising subject, the cow, was the representation of that subject as a *familiar* one. Writing of that situation, De Quincey states:

. . . Such subjects [familiar ones], even though positively disgusting, have a fascinating interest when reproduced by the painter or the poet,—upon what principle has possibly not been sufficiently explained. Even transient notices of objects and actions which are too indifferent to the mind to be more than half consciously perceived become highly interesting when detained and reanimated, and the full light of the consciousness thrown powerfully upon them, by a picturesque description. A street in London, with its usual furniture of causeway, gutter, lamp-posts, &c., is viewed with little interest, but, exhibited in a scene at Drury Lane, according to the style of its execution, becomes very impressive.¹⁵

"According to the style of its execution"—is not the style in question one which emphasizes what is characteristic? De Quincey here has in mind both natural and artificial objects (both a breeding cow and a London street) as represented in art, not for the sake of beauty (a thing they may not possess), but for the sake of the interest they have as familiar objects. He does not explicitly refer to their distinctive char-

¹⁴ "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 309.

¹⁵ "Postscript on Didactic Poetry," XI, 220.

acter as the source of their interest, but he does speak of their being reproduced by a *picturesque* description. This passage belongs to the year 1826, whereas the footnote defining the picturesque belongs to 1840. It seems reasonable to say that De Quincey's idea of the picturesque may not have attained a clear formulation in 1826; that if it had, he would have explained the fascinating interest which familiar objects have, when reproduced, in terms of the appeal which lies in distinctive or special character as brought into relief; and that instead of declaring that Virgil may have described the cow as a familiar object, he would have said as a "picturesque" object. But if the discussion of the interest of a familiar object is complemented by the later definition of the picturesque, so also is the conception of the picturesque enriched by the notion that a picturesque object is a familiar one. We recognize the "characteresque" only against a background of knowledge.

Whatever may be the difficulties attendant upon the idea of purpose as expressed in the picturesque—and we shall revert to that topic in connection with our analysis of the theory that distinct purpose is absent from the beautiful—the idea of the "characteresque" is clear enough in itself. In view of the emphasis which German critics had recently placed upon the conception of the characteristic,¹⁶ it is significant that De Quincey should extend recognition to a special aesthetic effect whose province it is to minister to the mind's interest in the characteristic by rendering it in a sensible excess.

His identification of the picturesque with the "characteresque" appears to be original, in the sense that he was the first to embody it in a formal definition. His idea of the picturesque as distinct from the beautiful doubtless owes something to Price's *Essay*, to which he refers on one occasion,¹⁷ but Price makes no mention of the characteristic or

¹⁶ Notably Goethe, whose insistence on the importance of the characteristic or typical in art was influenced by his scientific speculations concerning underlying types in nature; as in plants.

¹⁷ "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 308.

the "characteresque." For Price, the picturesque as contrasted with the beautiful is marked by roughness or ruggedness as opposed to regular variation, and by impressions of age, or even of decay, as opposed to those of youth and freshness.¹⁸ De Quincey may well have accepted this description as generally true—it would explain the failure of the picturesque to fascinate the eye for itself and force admiration. But he goes further than Price in that he attempts a rationale of the appeal of the picturesque.

It is possible that he derived his conception of the picturesque as the "characteresque," or at least implications of such a conception, from Wordsworth. This is suggested by his reference to Wordsworth's sense of proprietorship in the theory of picturesque beauty,¹⁹ as well as by the known fact of his general indebtedness to Wordsworth. Coleridge's definition of the picturesque perhaps bears a certain affinity to De Quincey's, yet it is too different and too indefinite to permit close comparison.²⁰

B. THE BEAUTIFUL

As is evidenced by the trend of his remarks in the long note on the picturesque, De Quincey tends to identify the beautiful with the lovely, the graceful, the elegant, and thus to share the somewhat feminine conception prominent in the eighteenth century. Indeed he directly connects the beauti-

¹⁸ In his idea of the beautiful, Price is close to Burke, who attributes smoothness and regularity to beauty—but suddenness to the sublime.

¹⁹ See *supra*, p. 70, note 10.

²⁰ "Where the perfection of form is combined with pleasureableness in the sensations excited by the matters or substances so formed, there results the beautiful Where the parts by their harmony produce an effect of a whole, but where there is no seen form of a whole producing or explaining the parts of it, where the parts only are seen and distinguished, but the whole is felt—the picturesque" (*Biographia Literaria*, edited by J. Shawcross [Oxford, 1907], II, 309. Shawcross quotes from Thomas Allsop's *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*). Coleridge's definition of the beautiful is similar to De Quincey's. His statement that in the picturesque the parts by their harmony produce the effect of a whole may be compared to De Quincey's phrase "a character . . . having unity in itself, and tending to one class of uses sufficient to mark it out by circumscription for a distinct and separate contemplation" (*Lake Reminiscences*, II, 361 n.).

ful with the feminine in the only comparative statement he makes anywhere concerning the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime:

. . . It is a great thought, a true thought, a demonstrable thought, that the Sublime . . . in contraposition to the Beautiful, grew up on the basis of *sexual* distinctions,—the Sublime corresponding to the male, and the Beautiful, its anti-pole, corresponding to the female. Behold! we show you a mystery!²¹

It is regrettable that De Quincey nowhere really enlarges upon his theory of the specific effect called "beauty." His statement that the beautiful forces admiration without a question of any distinct purpose might appear to be, on the face of it, an echo of the Kantian proposition that the beautiful is purposive without expressing a definite purpose. But for Kant the beautiful has nothing to do either with perfection or with utility; that is to say, *free* beauty is unrelated to these things. There is a beauty which attaches to the perfect and the useful, but it is an adherent or dependent beauty, and *it* expresses definite purpose—what Kant calls "internal" purpose in the perfect, "external" purpose in the useful. Now De Quincey identifies the beautiful with the ideal, that is, with the perfect, at the very same time that he asserts it to be without distinct purpose. This clearly militates against the notion that his concept of purposiveness is the same as Kant's. It may be that by "distinct purpose" he means *external* purpose. If so, the purposiveness expressed by the picturesque must be interpreted as being of the external sort. Most of his illustrations of that effect appear to justify this interpretation. The cart horse, the buildings of Rome in Nero's day, the "works of man" as seen in the Lake District, and Glasgow Observatory are all objects of utility. As has already been remarked, however, it is more difficult to view such objects as mountain landscapes as possessing utility, and these too are picturesque.

²¹ "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 300-301, footnote. De Quincey may easily have derived this view of sexual correspondence from Kant, who propounds it in his early work *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*.

But it is not even possible to rest the discussion of De Quincey's concept of purposiveness in the aesthetic experience on the rather dubious conclusion that the picturesque expresses external purpose, whereas the beautiful (or the sublime) does not. The situation is complicated by the fact that De Quincey, after all, recognizes a beauty of utility. This is best seen in his explication of the aesthetics of Virgil's cow. Two of the possibilities he suggests are that Virgil described the cow (1) as an *ideal* object, (2) as a *beautiful* object:

. . . Virgil's cow is an ideal in her class. Now, every ideal, or *maximum perfectionis* (as the old metaphysicians called it), in natural objects, necessarily expresses the dark power of nature which is at the root of all things under one of its infinite manifestations in the most impressive way; that which elsewhere exists by parts and fractions dispersed amongst the species and in tendency here exists as a whole and in consummation. A Pandora, who should be furnished for all the functions of her nature in a luxury of perfection, even though it were possible that the ideal beauty should be disjoined from this ideal organisation, would be regarded with the deepest interest. Such a Pandora in *her* species, or an approximation to one, is the cow of Virgil; and he is warranted by this consideration in describing her without the meanness of a didactic purpose.

. . . [Or, again, he may have described her as] a *beautiful* object. In those objects which are referred wholly to a purpose of utility, as a kitchen garden for instance, utility becomes the law of their beauty. With regard to the cow in particular, which is referred to no variety of purposes, as the horse or the dog, the external structure will express more absolutely and unequivocally the degree in which the purposes of her species are accomplished; and her beauty will be a more determinate subject for the judgment than where the animal structure is referred to a multitude of separate ends incapable of co-existing. Describing in this view, however, it will be said that Virgil presupposes in his reader some knowledge of the subject; for the description will be a dead letter to him unless it awakens and brightens some previous notices of his own. I answer that, with regard to all the common and familiar appearances of nature, a poet is entitled to postulate some knowledge in his readers²²

In view of De Quincey's linkage of the beautiful with the ideal in the note on the picturesque, it is curious that he should in this particular passage connect beauty not with

²² "Postscript on Didactic Poetry," XI, 220-221.

ideality but with utility. It is all the more curious in view of the fact that he regards a useful object as "of necessity a mean one,"²³ the beauty of which is therefore of a limited or inferior sort. But the essential point for us is that De Quincey does contravene his definition of the beautiful as an effect not expressing distinct purpose—to the extent of recognizing a secondary sort, which arises from adaptation of structure to function, and the perception of which presupposes knowledge of the function.

Thus De Quincey's conception of purposiveness as a criterion of difference between the beautiful and the picturesque is far from being either wholly clear or wholly decisive. It is only by something of a tour de force that we can regard all natural objects as useful, and therefore capable of being viewed as picturesque. Moreover, there is a beauty of utility. If the purposiveness of the picturesque is *not* limited to the external variety, then the criterion seems really hopeless. But the tenuousness of the criterion does not signify that the two effects in question are blurred in De Quincey's mind. The same object may be at once picturesque and beautiful, but even if its beauty is the beauty of utility the effects remain distinct. Individual character is one thing, the adaptation of structure to function is another. The drooping head and the shaggy mane of the picturesque cart horse *suggest* function—are a hieroglyphic symbol of it. But they are not instrumental to the end they suggest.

Before leaving behind the passage in which De Quincey

²³ *Ibid.*, 219. "This, for two reasons: 1st, because whatever is useful, and merely useful, is essentially definite, being bounded and restricted by the end to which it is adapted; it cannot transcend that end, and therefore can never in the least degree partake of the illimitable; 2d, because it is always viewed in a relation of inferiority to something beyond itself. To be useful is to be ministerial to some end; now, the end does not exist for the sake of the means but the means for the sake of the end. Hence, therefore, one reason why a wild animal is so much more admired [so much more beautiful] than the same animal domesticated. The wild animal is useless, or viewed as such; but, on that very account, he is an end to himself, whilst the tame one is merely an instrument or means for the ends of others" (*ibid.*, De Quincey's footnote).

discusses Virgil's cow as an ideal object, it will be well to pause a moment upon his conception of ideality, even though he does not here identify it with beauty. In the ideal object, he tells us, "that which elsewhere exists by parts and fractions dispersed amongst the species and in tendency . . . exists as a whole and in consummation." In other words, an ideal object is one which completely fulfills the idea of its class—is one which is least individual. This is, of course, the classical concept and has its relations to Platonic doctrine. But the statement which arrests attention is the one that every ideal is a particularly impressive manifestation of "the dark power of nature which is at the root of all things." Ideals, that is to say, are expressions of the mystery which underlies reality. The beautiful, as the embodiment of the ideal, is thus an agency by which man attains a shadowy knowledge of reality. In spite of himself, we may say, De Quincey is something of a Platonist—in so far as he identifies beauty with the ideal. But he nowhere clearly connects this conception with the notion of the beauty of artistic form.

It is interesting to note that De Quincey views the picturesque as an effect with which the art of painting is especially concerned, and the sublime and the beautiful as effects proper to sculpture. That he does so is evident in his statement that "the characteristic aim of painting is reality and life; of sculpture, ideality and duration."²⁴

C. THE SUBLIME

We turn now to the question of the sublime. It has already been stated that the only direct pronouncement which De Quincey makes concerning the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is the one in which he correlates these effects with sexual characteristics (see p. 75). From the statement that the sublime corresponds to the male sex there arise suggestions that it has relations to the large, the powerful, and the austere, but such suggestions do not constitute a definition.

²⁴ "Lessing's *Laocoon*," XI, 196 n.

In the same context in which the idea of sexual correspondence is set forth De Quincey describes "our idea of the sublime" (as distinct from the concept to which the Romans applied the word *sublimis*²⁵) as one "in which the notion of height is united with the notion of moral grandeur."²⁶ That statement, regrettably enough, is the most that he anywhere gives us by way of general definition, and it is far from adequate to describe all the phenomena which, in one place and another, he denominates "sublime." The sublime is a far more important effect for him than the picturesque, yet he nowhere chances to give an analysis of the one as he does of the other. We are left, therefore, to reconstruct his conception as best we can from a study of his concrete allusions to the sublime.

We may point out first of all that De Quincey regards the idea of the sublime—"the *Sublime by way of polar antithesis to the Beautiful*"—as "an idea altogether of English growth," which "had no existence amongst ancient critics."²⁷

. . . Τὸ ὑψηλόν, or the elevated, in the Longinian sense, expressed all, no matter of what origin, of what tendency, which gives a character of life and animation to composition—whatever raises it above the dead level of flat prosaic style. Emphasis, or what in an artist's sense gives *relief* to a passage, causing it to stand forward and in advance of what surrounds it—that is the predominating idea in the "sublime" of Longinus.²⁸

This definition clearly does less than full justice to the author of *On the Sublime*, who declares, "Sublimity is the note

²⁵ But De Quincey states that the Latin word "does *sometimes* correspond to our idea of the sublime" ("A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 300 n.).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* In his paper on Milton he presents a more qualified statement: "Let it be remembered that, of all powers which act upon man through his intellectual nature, the very rarest is that which we moderns call the *sublime*. The Grecians had apparently no word for it, unless it were that which they meant by τὸ σέμνον: for ὑψος was a comprehensive expression for all qualities which gave a character of life or animation to the composition,—such even as were philosophically opposed to the sublime" ("On Milton," X, 400).

²⁸ "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 300-301. Wordsworth's view of the Longinian sublime is substantially the same. See *Letters of the Wordsworth Family from 1787 to 1855*, edited by William Knight (London and Boston, 1907), II, 250.

which rings from a great mind." But De Quincey is of course correct in attributing to English sources the idea of the sublime as an aesthetic effect distinct from the beautiful.

De Quincey distinguishes between several varieties of the sublime, although he nowhere presents a list of them. We may start by noticing what may be considered the simplest mode—the "moral sublime." De Quincey concedes its manifestations in Roman literature:

. . . In the Roman poetry, and especially in Lucan, at times also in Juvenal, there is an exhibition of a moral sublime, perfectly distinct from anything known to the Greek poetry. The delineations of republican grandeur, as expressing itself through the principal leaders in the Roman camps, or the trampling under foot of ordinary superstitions, as given in the reasons assigned to Labienus for passing the oracle of the Libyan Jupiter unconsulted, are in a style to which there is nothing corresponding in the whole Grecian literature; nor would they have been comprehensible to an Athenian. The famous line "Jupiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris," and the brief review of such questions as might be worthy of an oracular god, with the summary declaration that every one of those points we know already by the light of nature, and could not know them better though Jupiter Ammon himself were to impress them on our attention . . . all this is truly Roman in its sublimity . . .²⁹

Here the moral sublime appears to be simply the effect arising from manifestations of the moral dignity and greatness of the human mind.

In the "Autobiography" De Quincey cites a particular passage from the Roman fabulist Phaedrus which, he tells us, "first of all revealed to me the immeasurableness of the morally sublime":

. . . Phaedrus naturally towered into enthusiasm when he had occasion to mention that the most intellectual of all races amongst men (viz., the Athenians) had raised a mighty statue to one who belonged to the same class in a social sense as himself (viz., the class of slaves), and rose above that class by the same intellectual power applying itself to the same object (viz., the moral apologue). These were the two lines in which that glory of the sublime, so stirring to my childish sense, seemed to burn as in some mighty pharos:—

"Aesopo statuam ingentem posuere Attici;
Servumque collocârunt eternâ in basi":

²⁹ "On Milton," X, 400-401.

A colossal statue did the Athenians raise to Aesop; and a poor pariah slave they planted upon an everlasting pedestal. I have not scrupled to introduce the word *pariah*, because in that way only could I decipher to the reader by what particular avenue it was that the sublimity which I fancy in the passage reached my heart. This sublimity originated in the awful chasm, in the abyss that no eye could bridge, between the pollution of slavery—the being a man, yet without right or lawful power belonging to a man—between this unutterable degradation and the starry altitude of the slave at that moment when, upon the unveiling of his everlasting statue, all the armies of the earth might be conceived as presenting arms to the emancipated man³⁰

Here again it is the moral dignity and greatness of the human mind that is the basis of the sublime, but the situation is more complex than those described in the passage first noticed, and we are given more definite clues as to the nature of the experience of the sublime. The sublime in this instance involves an intuition of moral grandeur presented, not in isolation, but in contrast to its opposite, here “the pollution of slavery.” The mind is confronted with the idea of the immeasurability of the abyss which lies between an unutterable degradation of spirit and a starry altitude of being. The imagination is asked to grasp at something too large for its capacity (an idea present in many views of the sublime from Addison to Kant and Coleridge), but the effect—so far as we can judge—is not even momentarily of pain and frustration (as it would be for Kant), but of a kind that is glorious and stirring, that affects the heart. We may say that the mind is exalted through an apprehension of its own moral greatness, realized not (as for Kant) through recoil upon itself after failure to encompass the object, but through the sense of its kinship to the object. The sublime object or idea thus becomes a revelation of “the infinity of the world within me.”³¹

This same general interpretation may be said to hold for the next species of the sublime to be considered: that species “which does not rest purely and merely on moral energies, but on a synthesis between man and nature.”

. . . [Of this species, which] may properly be called the ethico-physical sublime—there is but one great model surviving in the Greek

³⁰ I, 125–126.

³¹ “Letters to a Young Man,” X, 49.

poetry: viz. the gigantic drama of the Prometheus crucified on Mount Elborus. And this drama differs so much from everything else even in the poetry of Aeschylus,—as the mythus itself differs so much from all the rest of the Grecian mythology (belonging apparently to an age and a people more gloomy, austere, and nearer to the *incunabula mundi* than those which bred the gay and sunny superstitions of Greece),—that much curiosity and speculation have naturally gathered round the subject of late years.³² Laying this one insulated case apart, and considering that the Hebrew poetry of Isaiah and Ezekiel, as having the benefit of inspiration, does not lie within the just limits of competition, we may affirm that there is no human composition which can be challenged as constitutionally sublime,—sublime equally by its conception and by its execution, or as uniformly sublime from first to last,—excepting the "Paradise Lost." In Milton only, first and last, is the power of the sublime revealed. In Milton only does this great agency blaze and glow as a furnace kept up to a white heat, without suspicion of collapse.³³

The ethicophysical sublime, it is evident, is a variety in which great moral energies—energies both of good and of evil—are displayed against a background of the physically vast. The world of external nature coöperates with agencies and ideas from the moral world to produce effects of the unimaginably great, and an intuition of the infinities of spiritual reality:

. . . Space . . . what is it in most men's minds? The lifeless form of the world without us, a postulate of the geometrician, with no more vitality or real existence to their feelings than the square root of two. But . . . Milton has been able to *inform* this empty theatre, peopling it with Titanic shadows, forms that sat at the eldest counsels of the infant world, chaos and original night . . . so that, from being a thing to inscribe with diagrams, it has become under his hands a vital agent on the human mind. . . .³⁴

³² This sentence is a fair indication of De Quincey's real attitude toward the question of the existence of the sublime in Greek literature. His utterances on the point are not entirely consistent, but it is plain that he does not go so far in denying sublimity to the Greeks as does Coleridge, whose opinion is recorded in a note in the *Table Talk*: "Could you ever discover anything sublime, in our sense of the term, in the classic Greek literature? I never could. Sublimity is Hebrew by birth" (*Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, &c.*, edited by Hartley N. Coleridge [London, 1894], July 25, 1832). De Quincey recognizes Aeschylus along with Milton as "the sublimest of men" ("Schlosser's Literary History: On Swift," XI, 16).

³³ "On Milton," X, 401-402.

³⁴ "Letters to a Young Man," X, 49.

We may say that it is the ethicophysical sublime that is for De Quincey the basic or primary type—probably because of all kinds of sublimity it is the richest or most complex, and because in the hands of Milton and others it had been employed to create the most sustained and intense effects.

In entering upon our analysis of De Quincey's conception of the sublime through a consideration first of the purely moral sublime and then of the moral-physical, we have reversed the approach that is usually made to the problem of sublimity. Modern theory ordinarily starts from the fact that there are objects in nature which demand the designation "sublime." Our approach is suggestive of the fact that sublimity for De Quincey is always, in the ultimate analysis, an affair of moral intuition, and very often it is that from the start.

That is not to say that he does not find sublimity in nature as considered apart from human (or supernatural) agencies. He is not, however, so much given as are his great contemporaries to reflection upon a purely natural sublime. The world of physical nature is on the whole much less important to him than it is to Wordsworth and Coleridge; and he nowhere discusses the sublimity of mountain scenery, or of the ocean, or of great storms. It is the idea of space itself, and of time, that makes the largest appeal to his imagination, and except as these ideas are incorporated in the poetry of Milton or in the prose of Sir Thomas Browne,³⁵ or are suggested by

³⁵ "Where but in Sir T. B. shall one hope to find music so Miltonic, an intonation of such solemn chords as are struck in the following opening bar of a passage in the *Urn-Burial*—'Now, since these bones have rested quietly in the grave under the drums and trappings of three conquests,' &c. What a melodious ascent as of a prelude to some impassioned requiem breathing from the pomps of earth, and from the sanctities of the grave! . . . Time expounded, not by generations or centuries, but by the vast periods of conquests and dynasties; by cycles of Pharaohs and Ptolemies, Antiochi and Arsacides! And these vast successions of time distinguished and figured by the uproars which revolve at their inaugurations; by the drums and trappings rolling overhead upon the chambers of forgotten dead—the trepidations of time and mortality vexing, at secular intervals, the everlasting sabbaths of the grave! Show us, O pedant, such another strain from the oratory of Greece or Rome! For it is not an *Ὁ μα τους ἐν Μαραθωνι τῶν ἡκοντας*, or any such bravura, that will make a fit antiphony to this sublime rapture" ("Rhetoric," X, 105-106). Here the emphasis is on Browne's style and mind

the phenomena of the heavens, they are apt to take form in his mind as pure abstractions. These may, however, be transformed into symbols.

It is indeed primarily, if not exclusively, in the *symbolism* of natural objects that De Quincey discovers a sublimity of effect. We have seen in the last chapter how the abysses of space are for him the mirror of mightier abysses in man himself.³⁶ His musings on space do not in any way suggest that sublimity is resident in the mere fact of a vastness that is inconceivable to the imagination. What is sublime is at once the moral meanings which the mind reads from the alphabet of nature—and the mystery of the fact that nature is a complex alphabet, a system of hieroglyphics. For the mystery and complexity of these signs is in itself a thing that balks the imagination and yet suggests something of the nature of infinite reality.

This factor of the mysteriousness of nature's symbolism De Quincey sometimes tends to isolate as an effect by itself. It is primarily what he has in mind when he speaks of the "dark sublime." He tells us that he first experienced the dark sublime when, as a child, he read the story of Aladdin. The sublimity which one section of the story involved was "mysterious and unfathomable."

. . . At the opening of the tale, a magician living in the central depths of Africa is introduced to us as one made aware by his secret art of an enchanted lamp endowed with supernatural powers available for the service of any man whatever who should get it into his keeping. But *there* lies the difficulty. The lamp is imprisoned in subterranean chambers, and from these it can be released only by the hands of an innocent child. But this is not enough: the child must have a special horoscope written in the stars, or else a peculiar destiny written in his constitution Where shall such a child be found? . . . The magician knows: he applies his ear to the earth; he listens to the innumerable sounds of footsteps that at the moment of his experiment are tormenting the surface of the globe; and amongst them all, at a

play ("What a *fluctus decumanus* of rhetoric!"), yet the sublimity is ultimately resident in the effect of the idea of inconceivably vast stretches of time, and of eternity itself.

³⁶ See *supra*, p. 57.

distance of six thousand miles, playing in the streets of Bagdad, he distinguishes the peculiar steps of the child Aladdin

It follows, therefore, that the wicked magician exercises two demoniac gifts. First, he has the power to disarm Babel itself of its confusion. Secondly, after having laid aside as useless many billions of earthly sounds, and having fastened his murderous attention upon one insulated tread, he has the power, still more unsearchable, of reading in that hasty movement an alphabet of new and infinite symbols; for, in order that the sound of the child's feet should be significant and intelligible, that sound must open into a gamut of infinite compass. The pulses of the heart, the motions of the will, the phantoms of the brain, must repeat themselves in secret hieroglyphics uttered by the flying footsteps. Even the articulate or brutal sounds of the globe must be all so many languages and ciphers that somewhere have their corresponding keys—have their own grammar and syntax; and thus the least things in the universe must be secret mirrors to the greatest. Palmistry has something of the same dark sublimity. All this, by rude efforts at explanation that mocked my feeble command of words, I communicated to my sister; and she, whose sympathy with my meaning was always so quick and true, often outrunning electrically my imperfect expressions, felt the passage in the same way as myself, but not, perhaps, in the same degree. She was much beyond me in velocity of apprehension, and many other qualities of intellect. Here only, viz., on cases of the *dark* sublime, where it rested upon dim abstractions, and when no particular trait of *moral* grandeur came forward, we differed—differed, that is to say, as by more or by less.³⁷

The “dim abstractions” upon which the dark sublime rests in the story of Aladdin (as well as in palmistry) are, of course, the “secret hieroglyphics.” The dark sublimity itself consists in the immeasurableness of the mystery that the least things in the universe should be mirrors to the greatest, and in the apparently limitless and fearful power in the hands of him who can read their meanings. As regards the magician, moreover, there is a definitely hostile intent behind the exercise of such power. Thus the dark sublime appears to be dark in a double sense—to be at once mysterious and dreadful. In both respects it differs from the moral sublime, which involves nothing either of mysterious symbolism or of dread. And yet we may say that the dark sublime, as well as the moral or the bright, gives ultimately the effect of moral exaltation,

³⁷ “Autobiography,” I, 128–130.

since it provides intuitions of spiritual reality. We have seen in Chapter II that De Quincey tends to conceive of reality as being most deeply revealed through the concept of sin or evil (through which alone can its antithesis of holiness or the highest good be fully realized by the imagination), and in so far as the dark sublime involves the dreadful or the sinister it may be regarded as that species of sublimity 'dedicated to moving men's hearts by communicating a sense of the mystery of evil.

There is, however, a duality of effect in the dark sublime, and sometimes the sense of mystery seems to be present alone. De Quincey appears to recognize the dark sublime as characterized by a sense of pure mystery when he speaks of the Greek oracles:

. . . it was understood by all men that the Oracle did not so much evade the difficulty by a dark form of words as he revealed his own hieroglyphic nature. All prophets, the true equally with the false, have felt the instinct for surrounding themselves with the mystery of darkness. Look at the Hebrew prophets: never once are *they* direct and without obliquity. And in a religion like the Pagan, so deplorably meagre and starved as to most of the draperies connected with the mysterious and sublime, we must not seek to diminish its already scanty wardrobe.³⁸

In other places, however, mere mystery passes unmistakably into the dreadful:

. . . You, Mr. A, L, M, O, you who care not for Milton, and value not the dark sublimities which rest ultimately (as we all feel) upon dread realities, how can you seriously thrill in sympathy with the spurious and fanciful sublimities of the classical poetry—with the nod of the Olympian Jove, or the seven-league strides of Neptune?³⁹

It is to be noted that it is not the ethicophysical sublime alone which is found in Milton, but the dark sublime as well. And surely De Quincey is right. Books I and II of *Paradise Lost* are full of the mysterious and dread sublime. But perhaps we might say that the dark sublime is the "physical" element in the ethicophysical sublime, that the latter is a synthesis precisely of the moral and dark species.

³⁸ "The Pagan Oracles," VII, 78.

³⁹ "Autobiography," II, 72.

The moral, the moral-physical, and the dark sublime are forms of the sublime which, upon several occasions, De Quincey refers to as distinct varieties. He has a single reference to "sublimities of earthly misery and of human frenzy," as found in Shakespeare. It occurs in an exposition of his view of Addison's limitations of taste:

. . . Addison generally hated the impassioned, and shrank from it as from a fearful thing, yet this was when it combined with forms of life and fleshly realities (as in dramatic works), but not when it combined with elder forms of eternal abstractions. Hence he did not read, and did not like, Shakspeare,⁴⁰ the music was here too rapid and life-like; but he sympathised profoundly with the solemn cathedral-chanting of Milton. An appeal to his sympathies which exacted quick changes in those sympathies he could not meet, but a more stationary key of solemnity he *could*. Indeed, this difference is illustrated daily. A long list can be cited of passages in Shakspeare which have been solemnly denounced by many eminent men (all blockheads) as ridiculous: and, if a man *does* find a passage in a tragedy which displeases him, it is sure to seem ludicrous Whereas, of all the shameful people . . . that have presumed to quarrel with Milton, not one has thought him ludicrous, but only dull and somnolent. In "Lear" and in "Hamlet," as in a human face agitated by passion, are many things that tremble on the brink of the ludicrous to an observer endowed with small range of sympathy or intellect. But no man ever found the starry heavens ludicrous, though many find them dull, and prefer, for a near view, a decanter of brandy. So in the solemn wheelings of the Miltonic movement Addison could find a sincere delight. But the sublimities of earthly misery and of human frenzy were for him a book sealed.⁴¹

It is unquestionably the solemn wheelings of the Miltonic intellect which De Quincey himself esteems the more highly—as an incarnation of the sublime. But it is interesting to find that he accepts earthly misery and human frenzy in their impassioned representation as also deserving of the term "sublime." These objects, we may suppose, are sublime (that is, unimaginably great) in their ubiquity, their intensity, their fearful mystery. As we have seen in the last chapter, they are regarded by De Quincey as the concomitants of man's

⁴⁰ A statement characteristic in its perverse untruth of many of De Quincey's assertions concerning the writers of the early eighteenth century.

⁴¹ "Schlosser's Literary History," XI, 23-24.

sinful state. It might be said, then, that their representation in art constitutes a purely psychological form of the dark sublime.

It is unwise, of course, to attempt too definite a correlation of the varieties of sublimity recognized by De Quincey, when he himself has defined the relationship between two types only—the moral and the ethicophysical. But that the dark species represents the antithesis of the moral sublime seems clear enough. And it is an interesting fact that the two objects which he describes as the sublimest he had ever seen belong to these types: the Nebula of Orion as seen through Lord Rosse's telescope to the former and the Memnon's head in the British Museum to the latter. His interpretation of the mysterious and diabolical symbolism of the nebula has been described in Chapter II.⁴² His account of the Memnon's head is as follows:

... I looked at it, as the reader must suppose in order to understand the depth which I have here ascribed to the impression, not as a human, but as a symbolic head; and what it symbolised to me were:—1. The peace which passeth all understanding. 2. The eternity which baffles and confounds all faculty of computation; the eternity which *had* been, the eternity which *was* to be. 3. The diffusive love, not such as rises and falls upon waves of life and mortality, not such as sinks and swells by undulations of time, but a procession—an emanation from some mystery of endless dawn. You durst not call it a smile that radiated from the lips; the radiation was too awful to clothe itself in adumbrations or memorials of flesh.

In that mode of sublimity, perhaps, I still adhere to my first opinion, that nothing so great was ever beheld. The atmosphere for *this*, for the Memnon, was the breathlessness which belongs to a saintly trance; the holy thing seemed to live by silence. But there *is* a picture, the pendant of the Memnon, there *is* a dreadful cartoon, from the gallery which has begun to open upon Lord Rosse's telescope, where the appropriate atmosphere for investing it must be drawn from another silence, from the frost and from the eternities of death.⁴³

The nebula—or its appearance at a certain degree of magnification in the telescope—is an adumbration of ideas at one pole of infinite reality: diabolical evil and death. The Memnon's head is a symbol of ideas at the other pole: peace and love,

⁴² See *supra*, pp. 57–58.

⁴³ "System of the Heavens," VIII, 17.

together with the sense of their eternity. De Quincey's highest sublime, whether dark or bright, involves a mystical or transcendental ethic; it rests upon the sense of sin and the complementary sense of holiness. This serves to explain why he tends on the whole to feel that the ancients had no real sense of the sublime—they were not acquainted with the idea of the moral infinite—and why, in his opinion, "every Christian child is invested by an atmosphere of sublimity unknown to the greatest of Pagan philosophers."⁴⁴ De Quincey's sublime is ultimately a religious sublime.⁴⁵

Such is the picture we derive of the sublime when we bring together De Quincey's scattered illustrations. It is evident that he had less a theory than an idea—or several ideas—of the sublime as a specific effect. If we seek to define the common element in these ideas of the various species of sublimity, we arrive at some such statement as the following: The sublime is a subjective effect, residing in the response of the observer to an object. The response in every instance is one of impassioned and exalted feeling arising from or consisting in an intuition of some aspect of the moral infinite, the intuition following upon the attempt of the imagination to encompass an object which is inconceivably great, either in itself (in size, or duration, or power, or complexity, and so forth) or in the mystery or power of its symbolism. An element of fear or terror is sometimes present, sometimes not present.

A conception no more specific than this has too many affinities to the conceptions of other writers to make a definition of many of them feasible; it is easier to point out differences, and to suggest in what way the sublime of De Quincey appears to contain an element of originality.

In so far as De Quincey recognizes a purely moral or bright sublime—a sublime of peace and love and holiness—

⁴⁴ *Posthumous Works*, I, 227.

⁴⁵ This fact, as well as certain elements in De Quincey's theory relating to the sinister and evil, suggests some affinity to the view of John Dennis. See *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (London, 1701), pp. 26, 47, etc.; and *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (London, 1704), pp. 16-18, 87-88, 112, etc.

his view differs markedly from that of Burke, for whom the sublime always contained an ingredient of pain or fear. But De Quincey's idea of the dark sublime may well owe something to Burke, who names dark and obscure things, along with the vast and powerful, as those which arouse the feeling of fear. De Quincey of course goes far beyond Burke in that he finds adumbrations of moral reality in all dark phenomena.

De Quincey wrote for the *London Magazine* a translation of Kant's early essay "On National Character in Relation to the Sense of the Sublime and the Beautiful," in which the sublime is vaguely defined in such terms as the adventurous and romantic, the noble, and the magnificent; but it is evident that he recognized its superficiality from the fact that only a few years later he described it as an essay which Kant "did his best to make popular by making it determinately shallow and trivial."⁴⁶ In view of the fact that he left us no commentary on the *Critique of Judgement*, we have no direct indication of his attitude toward Kant's more mature speculations.

The expansion of soul which for De Quincey is attached to the experience of the sublime appears, as has already been suggested, to have a different source from that of the similar expansion which Kant attributes to the experience. There is nothing whatsoever in De Quincey to indicate that there are two stages in the experience—one a recoil in "a momentary check to the vital forces," caused by the temporary bafflement of the imagination and a realization of man's relative insignificance in comparison with the might and greatness of objects in nature, the other "a discharge all the more powerful" in a moment of expansion caused by the mind's sense of triumph in its realization of its own dignity and majesty as a portion of the moral infinite of the universe.⁴⁷ And De Quincey sets forth no metaphysical doctrine to account for the intuitions of the absolute obtained through the sublime. He is willing to accept the symbolizations of nature as

⁴⁶ "Kant in His Miscellaneous Essays," VIII, 91.

⁴⁷ *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, translated by J. H. Bernard (London, 1914), I, i, Nos. 27-29.

illimitably mysterious, but as speaking, somehow authentically, to the understanding heart.

To Coleridge's view of the sublime, as that view has been carefully set forth by Professor C. D. Thorpe,⁴⁸ De Quincey's conception bears numerous resemblances. De Quincey and Coleridge agree in regarding the sublime as inherently subjective and as consisting in an effect of infinity or "endless allness," in which, to quote Professor Thorpe, "moral ideas are inextricably interwoven." Both are inclined to depreciate the element of the sublime in Greek literature and art; both find the greatest examples of the sublime in literature in the Hebrew scriptures and in Milton. Neither accepts the Kantian notion of sublimity through contrast with great objects nor the idea of the two stages of recoil and expansion described by Kant. On the other hand, De Quincey is much less concerned with sublimity in nature than is Coleridge, who, like Addison and Kant, is greatly interested in the manifestations of grandeur and power in the external world. Coleridge is able to find sublimity in very small, even ugly, objects if they are capable of setting in motion a train of reflections that lead to ideas of the infinite; De Quincey admits sublimity in the painful and sinister if the mind is thereby filled with a sense of the darkly mysterious. Here he definitely parts company with Coleridge; for, in spite of the atmosphere of some of his poetry, "Christabel" in case, there is no place for the sinister in Coleridge's theory of the sublime.

The originality of De Quincey's conception of the sublime would appear to consist in his notion of the dark sublime, and, in particular, in his emphasis on the element of mystery in that species. Unquestionably there is value in the increased awareness which he gives us of the factor of dark mystery which may be present in the aesthetic experience, even though it is impossible to follow him in his obsession with the idea of hieroglyphic symbols.

The sublime is for De Quincey the primary aesthetic ef-

⁴⁸ "Coleridge on the Sublime," in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Studies in Honor of George McLean Harper*, edited by Earl Leslie Griggs (Princeton, 1939), pp. 192-219.

fect in literature. Certainly the picturesque is relatively unimportant in his thought; it does not enter extensively into his own imaginative work or—outside of Chaucer—into his appreciations of literature. His feeling for the specific effect of beauty finds its exercise for the most part in his concern for form or style. In so far as he regards literature as a mode of power—a mode of emotional realization of high truth—it is for him first of all a vehicle of the sublime.

II. THE NATURE AND THE FUNCTION OF ART

Having made a survey of De Quincey's pronouncements on the different aesthetic effects, we now turn our attention to his theory of the beautiful as embodied in art. His fullest explanation of what he tells us is "the very first principle concerned in *every* Fine Art"—the principle of *idem in alio*—is given in the course of a discussion on the characteristics of Greek tragedy, in his review "The *Antigone* of Sophocles as Represented on the Edinburgh Stage":

. . . In all [the arts] alike, more or less directly, the object is to reproduce in the mind some great effect through the agency of *idem in alio*. The *idem*, the same impression, is to be restored, but *in alio*, in a different material,—by means of some different instrument. For instance, on the Roman stage there was an art, now entirely lost, of narrating, and in part of dramatically representing, an impassioned tale by means of dancing, of musical accompaniment in the orchestra, and of elaborate pantomime in the performer. *Saltavit Hypermnestram*,—he danced (that is, he represented by dancing and pantomime the story of) Hypermnestra. Now, suppose a man to object that young ladies, when saving their youthful husbands at midnight from assassination, could not be capable of waltzing or quadrilling, how wide is this of the whole problem! This is still seeking for the *mechanic* imitation, some imitation founded in the very fact: whereas the object is to seek the imitation in the sameness of the impression drawn from a different, or even from an impossible, fact. If a man, taking a hint from the Roman "saltatio" (*saltavit Andromachen*), should say that he would "whistle Waterloo,"—that is, by whistling connected with pantomime, would express the passion and the charges of Waterloo,—it would be monstrous to refuse him his postulate on the pretence that "people did not whistle at Waterloo." Precisely so; neither are most people made of marble, but of a material as different as can well be imagined,—viz. of elastic flesh, with warm blood coursing along its tubes; and yet,

for all that, a sculptor will draw tears from you by exhibiting, in pure statuary marble on a sepulchral monument, two young children with their little heads on a pillow, sleeping in each other's arms; whereas, if he had presented them in waxwork, which yet is far more like to flesh, you would have felt little more pathos in the scene than if they had been shown baked in gilt gingerbread. He has expressed the *idem*, the identical thing expressed in the real children,—the sleep that masks death, the rest, the peace, the purity, the innocence,—but *in alio*, in a substance the most different: rigid, non-elastic, and as unlike to flesh, if tried by touch, or eye, or by experience of life, as can well be imagined. So of the whistling. It is the very worst objection in the world to say that the strife of Waterloo did not reveal itself through whistling: undoubtedly it did not; but that is the very ground of the man's art. He will reproduce the fury and movement as to the only point which concerns you, viz. the effect upon your own sympathies, through a language that seems without any relation to it: he will set before you what *was* at Waterloo through that which was *not* at Waterloo,—whereas any direct factual imitation, resting upon painted figures drest up in regimentals, and worked by watchwork through the whole movements of the battle, would have been no art whatsoever in the sense of a Fine Art, but a base *mechanic* mimicry.⁴⁹

It is to be noted first of all that De Quincey views art as a form of imitation or reproduction of some "great effect." It is significant that he tends to *assume* the effect, that he speaks as though it is something given at the start. The artist's work is to reproduce it, but "in a different material,—by means of some different instrument." Unless the effect is reproduced *in alio*, the imitation is a mechanic one, it is not fine art.

But why is reproduction *in alio* the desideratum? Surely it is not enough to say that what is essential *can* be reproduced

⁴⁹ X, 368-370. De Quincey's explanation of the principle of *idem in alio* is given a defensive cast by the fact that he is concerned with exhibiting the baselessness of Addison's hostility to Italian opera, a hostility supported by the argument, to use De Quincey's version, that "a hero ought not to sing upon the stage, because no hero known to history ever summoned a garrison in a song, or charged a battery in a semichorus" (*ibid.*, p. 368). De Quincey has here paraphrased Addison with much too great freedom for accuracy. Addison's own words (*The Spectator*, No. 29) were: "There is nothing that has more startled our *English* Audience, than the *Italian Retitativo* People were wonderfully surprized to hear Generals singing the Word of Command, and Ladies delivering Messages in Music." In De Quincey's rendition Addison's whimsical observation becomes transformed into a rule-of-thumb "ought not." (Last half of note supplied by C. D. T.)

in a different material or through a different agency. That might be adequate defense of the employment of a different material in a given situation, but it does not explain why the principle of *idem in alio* is to be regarded as the very first principle of the arts, and why literal copying is to be condemned as base mimicry.

Now there are certain expressions in the passage which may be interpreted as suggesting that the virtue of a fine art consists in the exhibition of such imagination and skill as are required to render an effect in a nonliteral medium. Indeed the opening sentence may be so interpreted if the emphasis is placed on the phrase "through the agency of *idem in alio*." This meaning is more clearly suggested by the statement that to represent the strife of Waterloo in a fashion in which that strife did not reveal itself on the actual battlefields "is the very ground of the man's art." The implication seems to be that the ability to employ such a vehicle as whistling, one so far removed in nature from the effect being reproduced, is somehow an admirable and pleasure-giving thing in itself. Again, De Quincey seems to mean that a realistic imitation of Waterloo would be contemptible, not because it would fail to convey the desired effect, but because the communication of the effect would be achieved in a manner that called forth no interest or admiration.

But the illustration derived from the work of sculpture suggests a different interpretation. If the sculptor had presented the sleeping children in waxwork—in a literal medium—the spectator would not have felt the pathos he was intended to feel. In this case De Quincey differentiates between subject and effect, or—to use the well-known term employed by Pater—between mere fact and the artist's peculiar sense of fact. The *idem* is no longer the fact itself; it is not the sleeping children as such. Instead it is the sculptor's sense of what is "expressed in the real children"—peace, purity, innocence. And De Quincey makes the successful communication of this peculiar sense of fact dependent upon the nonliteral reproduction of the subject or mere fact. Why the sense of fact can be conveyed only through reproduction in

alio is not explained in the immediate passage, but the reason is suggested a page or two further on, when, in introducing an account of "a scale of graduated ascents" in artifices that are employed to differentiate situations reproduced in drama from the same situations in real life, De Quincey describes the artifices as serving the function of "unrealizing" or idealizing the subjects.⁵⁰

This point of view is further clarified in a passage in the

⁵⁰ The passage is worth quotation:

"1. We may see, even in novels and prose comedies, a keen attention paid to the inspiriting and *dressing* of the dialogue: it is meant to be life-like, but still it is a little raised, pointed, coloured, and idealized.

"2. In comedy of a higher and more poetic cast we find the dialogue *metrical*.

"3. In comedy or in tragedy alike which is meant to be still further removed from ordinary life we find the dialogue fettered not only by metre, but by *rhyme*. We need not go to Dryden and others of our own middle stage, or to the French stage, for this: even in Shakspeare,—as for example, in parts of *Romeo and Juliet* (and for no capricious purpose).—we may see effects sought from the use of rhyme. There is another illustration of the idealizing effect to be obtained from a particular treatment of the dialogue, seen in the *Hamlet* of Shakspeare. In that drama there arises a necessity for exhibiting a play within a play. This interior drama is to be further removed from the spectator than the principal drama; it is a deep below a deep; and, to produce that effect, the poet relies chiefly upon the stiffening of the dialogue and removing it still farther than the general dialogue of the *including* or *outside* drama from the standard of ordinary life.

"4. We may suppose, superadded to these artifices for idealizing the situations, even music of an intermitting character, sometimes less, sometimes more, impassioned—recitatives, airs, choruses. Here we have reached the Italian Opera.

"5. And, *finally*, besides all these resources of art, we find dancing introduced, but dancing of a solemn, mystical, and symbolic character. Here, at last, we have reached the Greek Tragedy" ("*The Antigone* of Sophocles," X, 371-372).

It is De Quincey's position that "no form of human composition" employs the principle of *idem in alio* in more complexity than does Greek tragedy. It must not be supposed, however, that there is a hierarchy of aesthetic values corresponding to the hierarchy in which he has arranged his "unrealizing" effects. If that were so, the position of opera would be surprisingly high. That no such correspondence is intended can be inferred from the fact that while, according to De Quincey, the Greek drama went further in the idealizing of its effects than did the classical English drama, there is "not imparity, but disparity" between these "two magnificent theatres" (*ibid.*, p. 374), each of which sought a different object. We shall have occasion in the next chapter to consider De Quincey's attitude toward a hierarchy of aesthetic forms.

essay "Conversation and S. T. Coleridge" in the *Posthumous Works*, where De Quincey declares that

. . . the reason why the waxwork [any waxwork] disgusts is that it seeks to reproduce in literal detail the traits that should be softened under a general diffusive impression; the likeness to nature is presented in what is essentially fleeting and subsidiary, and the "check of difference" is found also in this very literality, and not in any effort of the etherealizing imagination, as it is in all true works of art . . .⁵¹

This statement represents De Quincey's closest approach to a recognition of the idea that the imagination, through idealizing its subject, really creates the particular effect which is the essential object to be communicated. Ordinarily, as has been pointed out, he tends to assume the effect as something given—to identify, in other words, the artist's sense of fact with the mere facts themselves; and, because he does so, he tends also to regard the "check of difference" which distinguishes the artistic reproduction from the original as residing, not in the artist's manner of conceiving his subject, but in the material or method of reproduction.

We have now presented two different interpretations of why it is that the rule of *idem in alio* is the very first principle concerned in any fine art. According to one of these, ingenuity in devising methods of nonliteral imitation and skill in using those methods appear to be the *raison d'être* of art—appear to constitute artistic beauty. The second interpretation suggests that De Quincey's view of artistic imitation is essentially the Aristotelian one of the disengagement of "form"—idea or effect—from "matter." Now it may seem that, at least in the passage we have been considering, the second interpretation is so much better substantiated than the first as to dispose of the first as a conception really present in De

⁵¹ II, 26. The passage quoted comes as the concluding statement of a somewhat extended criticism of Coleridge's application of the principle of imitation with a difference to waxwork figures (in "On Poesy or Art," *Biographia Literaria*, II, 255–256). Coleridge held that "a check of difference" was absent from a waxwork; it is De Quincey's point that the check of difference is not absent, but present in an unfortunate way. But De Quincey himself, in his extended passage on the principle of *idem in alio* would seem to fall into the very error he attributes to Coleridge.

Quincey's mind. But such a conclusion would not be justified. We have evidence from other sources that De Quincey values stylistic invention and the graceful manipulation of the artistic vehicle as an end in itself, that for him virtuosity and display may even be the sole end of a work of art.

It will be remembered that one of the modes of artistic beauty which De Quincey names in his analysis of what may have been Virgil's reasons for describing a cow is that of "a *difficult* and intractable subject," described "by way of a *bravura*, or passage of execution." His elaboration of this idea is relevant here:

... To describe well is not easy; and, in one class of didactic poems, of which there are several, both in Latin, English, and French,—viz. those which treat of the mechanic parts of the critical art,—the chief stress of the merit is thrown upon the skill with which thoughts not naturally susceptible of elegance, or even of a metrical expression, are modulated into the proper key for the style and ornaments of verse. This is not a very elevated form of the poetic art, and too much like rope-dancing. But to aim humbly is better than to aim awry, as Virgil would have done if interpreted under Lessing's idea of didactic poetry.⁵²

De Quincey is here speaking of a kind of poetry which is really a tour de force, and which he admits to be a lowly form. But it is made clear that he entertains the idea that mere execution—the beauty of mere execution—may be an end in itself. Furthermore, he does not always defend the beauty of execution on such low ground, as is seen from the following important pronouncement:

It is certain that style, or (to speak by the most general expression) the management of language, ranks amongst the fine arts, and is able therefore to yield a separate intellectual pleasure quite apart from the interest of the subject treated . . . style has an *absolute* value, like the product of any other exquisite art, quite distinct from the value of the subject about which it is employed, and *irrelatively* to the subject; precisely as the fine workmanship of Scopas the Greek, or of Cellini the Florentine, is equally valued by the connoisseur, whether embodied in bronze or marble, in an ivory or a golden vase.

. . . [Style is] a mode *per se* of the beautiful and a fountain of intellectual pleasure.⁵³

⁵² "Postscript on Didactic Poetry," XI, 220.

⁵³ "Language," X, 260-261.

De Quincey's theory of literary style must be considered in a chapter by itself, and this particular comment will then be examined in the light of its very interesting context. But it is relevant here because its assertions about style are made on the ground that style is itself a fine art. It is the premise of his thought that the arts in general are able to yield a separate intellectual pleasure quite apart from the interest of the subject treated. Considered from this point of view, *art is workmanship*. The beauty of art is the beauty of workmanship. And the end of art is precisely the intellectual pleasure which comes from the mind's perception of this beauty—of the skill and grace with which the artist has manipulated his material in the face of the problem of reproduction he has set himself.

A further elaboration of the conception of art as consisting chiefly in the beautiful manipulation of a medium and as ministering to intellectual pleasure is found in a footnote in which De Quincey takes exception to another idea of Lessing's. Lessing states that costume was slighted in the sculpture of the ancients, "for with their art under its highest law, which is Beauty, they felt that costume of any form was irreconcilable. Necessity it was that invented clothes; and what has art to do with necessity?"⁵⁴ While our concern in the note based on this statement is not with De Quincey's argument about drapery as such, his declaration of general principles is so interwoven with it that it will be necessary to quote most of his extended comment:

Here is a singular specimen of logic:—Necessity invented clothes; and therefore art can have nothing to do with drapery. On the same principle, art would have nothing to do with architecture. What is the minor proposition by which Lessing would connect his conclusion with his major? Manifestly this,—that it belongs to the very idea of a fine art, as distinguished from a mechanic art, to afford the utmost range to the *free* activities of the creative faculty; so that, for instance, it would obliterate this idea if it were to pursue any end to which the understanding could point out *necessarily* the means and *shortest* course. This is what the understanding does with regard to a purpose of utility in a mechanic art: the means are here given, and virtually

⁵⁴ "Lessing's *Laocoon*," XI, 194.

pre-exist in the end, and are unfolded by the understanding, gradually and tentatively as respects the individual artist, but with the severest necessity as respects the object; so that, if ever the artist may seem to have any freedom, it is only so long as he mistakes his course. Such is the ellipsis of Lessing,—which, however, is of no avail to his conclusion. Necessity invented dress, and to a certain extent the same necessity continues to preside over it; a necessity, derived from climate and circumstances, dictates a certain texture of the dress; a necessity, derived from the human form and limbs, dictates a certain arrangement and a corresponding adaptation. But thus far dress is within the province of a *mechanic* art. Afterwards, and perhaps in a very genial climate *not* afterwards but originally, dress is cultivated as an end *per se*, both directly for its beauty, and as a means of suggesting many pleasing ideas of rank, power, youth, sex, or profession. Cultivated for this end, the study of drapery is a *fine* art; and a draped statue is a work not in one but in two departments of art. Neither is it true that the sense of necessity and absolute limitation is banished from the idea of a fine art. On the contrary, this sense is indispensable as a means of resisting (and, therefore, realising) the sense of freedom; the freedom of a fine art is found not in the absence of restraint, but in the conflict with it. The beauty of dancing, for instance, as to one part of it, lies in the conflict between the freedom of the motion and the law of equilibrium, which is constantly threatened by it; sometimes also in the intricacy of the figure, which is constantly tending to swerve from a law which it constantly obeys; and sometimes in the mutual reference of two corresponding dancers, or a centripetal reference of the whole, where the *launch*, as it were, of the motion and passion of the music seems likely to impress a centrifugal tendency. Moreover, it is as inconsiderate in Lessing to suggest any opposition between the beauty of drapery and the beauty of the human form as between the sun and the clouds, which may obscure, but may also reflect its lustre. They are not *so* in opposition but that they may coalesce to a common effect; and the fact is that in nature neither the grace nor the majesty of the human figure is capable of being fully drawn out *except* by drapery. In part this may be owing to the fact that we are too little familiar with the undraped figure to be able so readily in that state to judge of its proportions, its attitude or its motion; and partly to the great power of drapery under the law of association. But in a still greater degree it is due to the original adaptation, neither accidental nor derivative, of drapery to the human figure; which is founded in some measure on its power of repeating the flowing outlines of the human figure in another and more fluent material; whence arises the pleasure, subtlest of all in nature, and the most extensively diffused, of similitude in dissimilitude. That drapery is not essential in sculpture, and that the highest effects of sculpture are in fact produced without it,

is in some measure dependent on this very law of the interfusion of the similar and the dissimilar; for, in order that any effect should be felt as the *idem in altero*, it is necessary that each should be distinctly perceived; whereas, in sculptural drapery, from the absence of shading and of colouring, the "alterum" is not sufficiently perceived as an "alterum."⁵⁵

De Quincey accepts the general distinction between a mechanic art and a fine art which he attributes to Lessing's thought—the former does not involve free creativity. But his point is that necessity is not excluded from the idea of a fine art; indeed, art's freedom is found only in conflict with necessity or restraint. At least one part or one kind of the beauty of art is that which results from the overcoming of the resistance offered.

What is said in this passage of similitude in dissimilitude, or *idem in alio*, is not made to relate directly to the discussion of freedom versus necessity; but may we not say that it is the logic of De Quincey's position in general that the *idem* in art represents *necessity*, and that the *aliud* represents *freedom*?

But, in terms of this quotation, the intellectual pleasure afforded by art includes more than the mind's delight in perceiving how necessity is overcome: the perception of sameness in difference is itself a pleasure; it is indeed, we are told, one of the subtlest and most widely diffused in nature.

We are now in a better position than before to appreciate the fundamental ambiguity in the statement that, "In all [the arts] alike . . . the object is to reproduce in the mind some great effect through the agency of *idem in alio*."⁵⁶ This statement can now be interpreted in *three* ways: (1) The object of the arts is to minister to our sense of pleasure in the mere perception of *idem in alio*, or similitude in dissimilitude; (2) The object of the arts is to afford us the pleasure of admiring the beauty of workmanship involved in reproducing a given effect in a different material—the beauty of resistance overcome; (3) The object of the arts is to communicate a great effect, and this end is achieved by means of

⁵⁵ "Lessing's Laocoon," XI, 194–196.

⁵⁶ "The *Antigone* of Sophocles," X, 368.

idealizing the subject through the selection of a suitable material or method.

All these conceptions are present in De Quincey's mind. According to the first two, the aim of the arts is pleasure; according to the third, the aim is power. On some occasions he thinks in terms of the one aim, on other occasions, in terms of the other. In the long passage on the principle of *idem in alio* both are present in somewhat confused fashion in his thought.

The thesis was stated in the introductory chapter that De Quincey's theory of literature is characterized by paradox—by the presence of the conflicting concepts of power and of pleasure as the end of literature. This thesis is the central one of our entire study. We have now discovered that the paradox shows itself in his statements about the fine arts in general.

De Quincey's conflict of idea is brought out sharply by a comparison of two further statements concerning the arts. The first of these is a mere phrase which occurs in the second paragraph of the "Rhetoric." Two popular conceptions of rhetoric have been defined; according to one of them, it is "an art of ostentatious ornament":

. . . A man is held to play the rhetorician when he treats a subject with more than the usual gaiety of ornament, and, perhaps we may add, as an essential element in the idea, with *conscious* ornament. This is one view of Rhetoric; and under this what it accomplishes is not so much to persuade as to delight, not so much to win the assent as to stimulate the attention and captivate the taste. And even this purpose is attached to something separable and accidental in the manner . . . [Under this view rhetoric] is occupied with the general end of the fine arts—that is to say, intellectual pleasure . . .⁵⁷

De Quincey, to be sure, rejects this view of rhetoric (though his own theory is strangely similar); our present interest, however, is not in his theory of rhetoric but in his assertion that *the general end of the fine arts is intellectual pleasure* and in his definition of intellectual pleasure as the captivation of taste. We are interested, furthermore, in the implication

that the pleasure is one which may have its sole source in manner or style regarded as separate from matter.

Alongside this statement let us place the following—part of another note in which De Quincey corrects Lessing:

... the fundamental error [in a particular passage in Lessing] lies in affirming the final objects of the Fine Arts to be pleasure. Every man, however, would shrink from describing Aeschylus or Phidias, Milton or Michael Angelo, as working for a common end with a tumbler or a rope-dancer. "No!" he would say, "the pleasure from the Fine Arts is ennobling, which the other is not." Precisely so: and hence it appears that not pleasure, but the sense of power and the illimitable incarnated as it were in pleasure, is the true object of the Fine Arts, and their final purpose therefore, as truly as that of Science and much more directly, the exaltation of our human nature . . . ⁵⁸]

Surely the two statements are antithetical. The assertion in the second that the sense of power and the illimitable is incarnated in pleasure is an important suggestion—the most general and the most direct to be found anywhere in De Quincey—toward a reconciliation of the two points of view; but it does not avert contradiction of the definition set forth in the first statement, for *there* there is nothing to indicate that he has in mind any conception of power or the exaltation of human nature.

The theory of art as intellectual pleasure—as the gratification of taste—is one which emphasizes manner as something distinct from matter. The theory of art as power is one which tends to throw emphasis on matter—on the effect which is reproduced—rather than on the vehicle and technique of reproduction. If manner and matter were to be regarded as one thing, in the sense in which body and mind are one thing, the conflict between the two theories would be diminished if not altogether removed. [Now one of De Quincey's particular claims to fame as a critic is, of course, his promulgation of the very proposition that style is the incarnation of thought.] But he does not adhere consistently to this conception. Not even in theory does he maintain that style is always simply the embodiment of thought, or that it is inseparable from thought: it is so, he holds, only in some

kinds or on some levels of art. The inconsistency, therefore, in his theory of art is rooted in his anomalous theory of style, taking that term in its largest possible sense. But we shall not anticipate further, at this point, what must be the conclusion of later inquiry. Our purpose here has been only to introduce the paradox in De Quincey's theory of literature by demonstrating that the same conflict of ideas exhibits itself in his general aesthetic.

It is in De Quincey's utterances on the art of music that he best contrives to give us the impression of a synthesis in his thought between the two functions pleasure and power.⁵⁹ And in view of the peculiarly inseparable relationship of musical content to musical form, this fact is explicable enough. Certain difficulties arise, none the less, from his use of the term "intellectual pleasure" to describe the experience which is produced by music.

In the *Posthumous Works* occurs the following note: "I am satisfied that music involves a far greater mystery than we are aware of. It is that universal language which binds together all creatures, and binds them by a profounder part of their nature than anything merely intellectual ever could."⁶⁰ Here, unmistakably, De Quincey is thinking of music as a mode of appeal to the understanding heart—as a mode of power. One should hardly expect him to assent to the term "pleasure" as a name for music's function. Yet in the essay "Style," he states that music is "at the head of the physico-intellectual pleasures."⁶¹

In his most extended comment on the art we find music viewed as a mode of revelation at the same time that its function is spoken of as pleasure; we find, moreover, a distinction between intellectual and sensual pleasure:

. . . For music is an intellectual or a sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it. And, by the bye, with the

⁵⁹ It is safe to say that music ranked second only to literature among the arts in De Quincey's esteem. He describes it as the most effective of the fine arts, as a divine art ("Style," X, 135-136). Professor Horace A. Eaton has gathered the facts concerning De Quincey's relation to music in his article "De Quincey's Love of Music," *Journal of English and German Philology*, XIII (1914), 247-258.

⁶⁰ I, 274.

⁶¹ X, 137.

exception of the fine extravaganza on that subject in "Twelfth Night," I do not recollect more than one thing said adequately on the subject of music in all literature. It is a passage in the "Religio Medici" of Sir T. Browne, and, though chiefly remarkable for its sublimity, has also a philosophic value, inasmuch as it points to the true theory of musical effects.⁶² The mistake of most people is, to suppose that it is by the ear they communicate with music, and therefore that they are purely passive as to its effects.⁶³ But this is not so; it is by the reaction of the mind upon the notices of the ear (the *matter* coming by the senses, the *form* from the mind) that the pleasure is constructed; and therefore it is that people of equally good ear differ so much in this point from one another. Now opium, by greatly increasing the activity of the mind, generally increases, of necessity, that particular mode of its activity by which we are able to construct out of the raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure. "But," says a friend, "a succession of musical sounds is to me like a collection of Arabic characters: I can attach no ideas to them." Ideas! my dear friend! there is no occasion for them; all that class of ideas which can be available in such a case has a language of representative feelings. But this is a subject foreign to my present purposes; it is sufficient to say that a chorus, &c., of elaborate harmony displayed before me, as in a piece of arras-work, the whole of my past life—not as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music; no longer painful to dwell upon, but the detail of its incidents removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction, and its passions exalted, spiritualised, and sublimed.⁶⁴

It is understandable enough that Sir Thomas Browne's conception of music as "an Hieroglyphical and shadowed

⁶² The passage referred to is the following: "For my self, not only from my obedience, but my particular Genius, I do embrace . . . [church music]: for even that vulgar and Tavern-Musick, which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the First Composer. There is something in it of Divinity more than the ear discovers: it is an Hieroglyphical and shadowed lesson of the whole World, and creatures of God; such a melody to the ear, as the whole World, well understood, would afford the understanding. In brief, it is a sensible fit of that harmony which intellectually sounds in the ears of God. I will not say with Plato, the soul is an harmony, but harmonical, and hath its nearest sympathy unto Musick . . ." (*The Religio Medici and Other Writings* [Everyman ed.; London, 1906], p. 80).

⁶³ Curiously enough, De Quincey has said at an earlier point in the "Confessions": "Too soon I became aware that to the deep voluptuous enjoyment of music absolute *passiveness* in the hearer is indispensable" (III, 270). We can only surmise that he regards such voluptuous enjoyment as an inferior mode of appreciation.

⁶⁴ "Confessions," III, 390-391.

lesson of the whole World" should make a strong appeal to De Quincey. What is particularly striking in the passage is the apparent identification of realization of the ultimate with intellectual pleasure. Intellectual pleasure signifies more in this context than it can be supposed so signify in the others we have examined. Doubtless it includes delight in the pattern of the music as such, but that pattern is itself a mode of intuition of the harmony of being.

It is interesting that De Quincey here conceives of the final effect of music as being created by the listener at least as much as by the composer. This view is something more than the one that the artist simply reproduces—in *alio*—a given effect. There is no other passage in De Quincey which so stresses the contribution that reader, spectator, or listener makes to the art experience.

The sources from which De Quincey must have derived his conception of the part played by similitude in dissimilitude in artistic representation are not far to seek. They are essentially two, and this duality of source may help to explain the duality of function which he assigns to the effect.

The idea of similitude in dissimilitude as a source of pleasure to the mind was an old one in his day. Loosely identified with the principle of uniformity and variety, it was a critical commonplace to the eighteenth-century school of taste. It was stressed by Addison and Hartley, and especially by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Beatty has shown that Wordsworth's employment of the principle is due to the effect of these writers upon his thought.⁶⁵ Wordsworth uses it to justify metre and rhyme in poetry.⁶⁶ In so far as De Quincey regards the mere perception of likeness in unlikeness as a pleasure and an end in itself, he exhibits the influence of this tradition. Wordsworth is probably the special source of the impression which the principle, regarded in this light, made upon his thinking.

But it is almost certainly from the German thinkers and

⁶⁵ Arthur Beatty, *William Wordsworth, His Doctrine and Art in Their Historical Relations* (Madison, 1927).

⁶⁶ Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

from Coleridge that De Quincey derived the principle of *idem in alio* as a philosophic explanation of the idea of artistic imitation. Coleridge and the Germans concurred in the traditional view of similitude in dissimilitude as a pleasure of the mind, but to them the principle meant much more than that. Thus Coleridge writes:

. . . It is sufficient that philosophically we understand that in all imitation two elements must coexist, and not only coexist, but must be perceived as coexisting. These two constituent elements are likeness and unlikeness, or sameness and difference, and in all genuine creations of art there must be a union of these disparates. The artist may take his point of view where he pleases, provided that the desired effect be perceptibly produced,—that there be likeness in the difference, difference in the likeness, and a reconciliation of both in one. If there be likeness to nature without any check of difference, the result is disgusting, and the more complete the delusion, the more loathsome the effect.⁶⁷

This is part of the passage which De Quincey quotes when criticizing Coleridge for his faulty application of the principle to the problem of a waxwork figure.⁶⁸ Though De Quincey's particular criticism is well taken, Coleridge's basic conception is De Quincey's own. Or it would be better to say that De Quincey's conception is that of Coleridge—and is more completely propounded in this lecture than it is anywhere set forth by De Quincey. The conception is, of course, that the check of difference in artistic imitation serves the function of idealizing the subject, of freeing it from all merely accidental characteristics. Coleridge's lecture is a direct parallel to, if not an actual plagiarism from, Schelling; De Quincey was familiar with both sources.

As the principle of similitude in dissimilitude, in the English tradition, may be regarded as a particular application of the principle of uniformity and variety, so the principle of *idem in alio*, in German thought and in the thought of Coleridge, may be regarded as a special instance of the principle of the reconciliation of opposites.

⁶⁷ "On Poesy or Art," *Biographia Literaria*, II, 256.

⁶⁸ See *supra*, p. 96, note 51.

CHAPTER IV

Literature as Power

I. THE IDEA OF LITERATURE: THE LITERATURE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE LITERATURE OF POWER

IN TWO different contexts in his writings—in Number III of the “Letters to a Young Man” (1823) and in “The Poetry of Pope” (1848)—De Quincey essays a general definition of the idea of literature. The passages in question are among the best known of his *loci critici* and contain the richest one of his pronouncements on the theory of literature. In both of them his thought is based on the conception of knowledge and power as antithetical functions of books.

It is important at the outset that we differentiate between two conceptions of the relation to literature of this antithesis made famous by De Quincey. The idea that the antithesis is of service in that one of its terms—“power”—defines the unique function of literature is one thing. The idea that there exist two kinds or classes of literature answering to the functions knowledge and power is quite another. De Quincey’s distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power ostensibly supports the second conception. It is set forth for the first time in the 1848 passage. In the 1823 account, books of knowledge as distinguished from books of power are expressly referred to as “anti-literature.” Whether it is De Quincey’s idea of literature that changes, or only his terminology, is one question which it will be the task of the present section to answer.

There is a brief statement of the proper meaning of the word “literature” in Number I of the “Letters to a Young

Man" which will serve to introduce the definition contained in Number III. De Quincey speaks of ". . . Literature, in the proper acceptation of the term, as denoting what is otherwise called *Belles Lettres*, &c.—that is, the most eminent of the fine arts, and so understood, therefore, as to exclude all *science* whatsoever"¹ This statement indicates at once that, writing in 1823, De Quincey is conceiving of literature in the narrowest of senses—the sense in which it is strictly a fine art; and it is of special interest because by way of defining that which literature is not, the word "science" is used, whereas in all other contexts the word employed is "knowledge."

. . . The word *literature* [reads the passage in Letter III] is a perpetual source of confusion, because it is used in two senses, and those senses liable to be confounded with each other. In a philosophical use of the word, Literature is the direct and adequate antithesis of Books of Knowledge. But, in a popular use, it is a mere term of convenience for expressing inclusively the total books of a language. In this latter sense, a dictionary, a grammar, a spelling-book, an almanac, a pharmacopoeia, a Parliamentary report, a system of farriery, a treatise on billiards, the Court Calendar, &c. belong to the literature. But, in the philosophical sense, not only would it be ludicrous to reckon these as parts of the literature, but even books of much higher pretensions must be excluded—as, for instance, books of voyages and travels, and generally all books in which the matter to be communicated is paramount to the manner or form of its communication ("ornari res ipsa negat, contenta doceri").²

The criterion of literature in the philosophical sense, it would appear, is salience of manner or form of communication—of style. But this is merely a suggestion by the way: De Quincey vouchsafes nothing further in this context, or in the 1848 account of literature, concerning the relation of style to the idea of literature in the philosophical sense. We shall, therefore, postpone to a later chapter (Chapter V) an analysis of that highly important relationship.

It is not easy, continues De Quincey, to construct the idea of literature with severe accuracy, since literature is a fine art and subject to the difficulties attending such a subtle

¹ X, 14.² *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

notion; but for practical purposes it will be sufficient to pursue the statement already made that it is the antithesis of books of knowledge.³

. . . Now, what is that antithesis to *knowledge* which is here implicitly latent in the word *literature*? The vulgar antithesis is *pleasure* ("aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetae"). Books, we are told, propose to *instruct* or to *amuse*. Indeed! . . . In which class of books does the *Paradise Lost* stand? . . . Now, if a man answers among those which instruct, he lies; for there is no instruction in it, nor could be in any great poem, according to the meaning which the word must bear in this distinction, unless it is meant that it should involve its own antithesis. But, if he says, "No; amongst those which amuse," then what a beast must he be to degrade, and in this way, what has done the most of any human work to raise and dignify human nature The true antithesis⁴ to knowledge, in this case, is not *pleasure*, but *power*. All that is literature seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature, to communicate knowledge Henceforth, therefore, I shall use the antithesis power and knowledge as the most philosophical expression for literature (that is, *Literae Humaniores*) and anti-literature (that is, *Literae didacticae* . . .).⁵

We shall take notice in the next section of the extraordinarily suggestive definition of power with which De Quincey closes his 1823 account of the idea of literature. At the moment we are concerned not with the exact nature of power itself—the surface meaning of the word, together with the fact that it is to be regarded as antithetical to knowledge or instruction, will support the discussion for the present—but with the fact that in this context De Quincey does not admit of the application of the word "literature" in its philosophical sense to any books but the books of power. He

³ De Quincey's reference to the difficulties of constructing the idea of literature with severe accuracy, because it is a fine art, may be interpreted as arising out of an intuition of the fact that to have elaborated the criterion already suggested for distinguishing between what is literature and what is not—the criterion of the relative importance of style and matter—not only would in itself have resulted in perplexity, but would have led to the danger of conflicting with the theory of literature as power.

⁴ "For which distinction, as for most of the sound criticism on poetry, or any subject connected with it that I have ever met with, I must acknowledge my obligations to many years' conversation with Mr. Wordsworth" ("Letters to a Young Man," X, 48, De Quincey's footnote).

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–49.

does not, in other words, recognize a literature of knowledge, but only books of knowledge. We observe also that he sets up a highly restrictive concept of works of power, which shuts out from the domain of literature not only compendia of pure information "but even books of much higher pretensions," such as books of travel. De Quincey's 1823 definition of literature is so restrictive as to be sure to give rise to dissent on the part of many readers.

We now pass to a consideration of the 1848 account, the passage in "The Poetry of Pope," which may be described as De Quincey's major utterance, and his most definitive, on the theory of literature. Again he starts with a criticism of the popular loose conception of what constitutes literature:

What is it that we mean by *literature*? Popularly, and amongst the thoughtless, it is held to include everything that is printed in a book. Little logic is required to disturb *that* definition. The most thoughtless person is easily made aware that in the idea of *literature* one essential element is some relation to a general and common interest of man,—so that what applies only to a local, or professional, or merely personal interest, even though presenting itself in the shape of a book, will not belong to Literature. So far the definition is easily narrowed; and it is as easily expanded. For not only is much that takes a station in books not literature; but inversely, much that really is literature never reaches a station in books.⁶

As examples of books which are not literature, De Quincey instances the parliamentary Blue Books:

... What are called *The Blue Books*,—by which title are understood the folio Reports issued every session of Parliament by committees of the two Houses, and stitched into blue covers . . . will be acknowledged gratefully by those who have used them diligently as the main well-heads of all accurate information as to the Great Britain of this day. . . . But no man would therefore class the *Blue Books* as literature.⁷

As examples of the literature which exists outside of books he instances the "weekly sermons of Christendom, that vast pulpit literature which acts so extensively upon the popular mind—to warn, to uphold, to renew, to comfort, to alarm"⁸—and much drama.

Now the idea that literature is not confined to books,

⁶ XI, 53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54 n.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

any more than it is coextensive with them, is undeniably important, being one of those ideas which require reaffirmation now and again in a bookish age. Introduced here, moreover, it has the effect of clearing the ground for a fresh inquiry into the essential character of literature: it is precisely the preliminary sort of basic distinction with which De Quincey is wont to open his analysis of a subject. Regrettably, however, it is not followed up by any thoroughgoing analysis of the elements common to all that is to be recognized as literature; De Quincey contents himself with naming one such element: namely, "some relation to a general and common interest of man," as distinguished from a local, professional, or personal interest.⁹

This criterion is plainly different from either of those presented in 1823—from the criterion of the paramount importance of manner or form, and from that of the communication of power. It rules out, to be sure, the class of books (here represented by the Blue Books) which in the earlier account were declared to be so obviously not a part of literature that it would be ludicrous to propose their inclusion. But there is nothing to indicate that it rules out those books described as "of much higher pretensions," which fail to give style as much consideration as matter. It would appear that De Quincey now has in mind a more generously inclusive concept of literature than his earlier one.

This impression is supported by what follows. The general remarks about literature just noticed are designed only to set the stage for an exposition of the distinction between knowledge and power as it exists *within the field of literature*:

. . . a far more important correction [than that involved in the proposition that books are not coextensive and interchangeable with the idea of literature], applicable to the common vague idea of literature, is to be sought not so much in a better definition of literature as in a sharper distinction of the two functions which it fulfils. In that great social organ which, collectively, we call literature, there may be distinguished two separate offices that may blend and often *do* so, but

⁹*Ibid.* The definition of literature in these terms corresponds more exactly with the traditional concept of "humane letters" than does the narrower definition, proposed in 1823, of the literature of power.

capable, severally, of a severe insulation, and naturally fitted for reciprocal repulsion. There is, first, the literature of *knowledge*; and, secondly, the literature of *power*. The function of the first is—to *teach*; the function of the second is—to *move*: the first is a rudder; the second, an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the *mere* discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely, it may travel towards an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls *dry* light; but, proximately, it does and must operate,—else it ceases to be a literature of *power*,—on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering *iris* of human passions, desires, and genial emotions.¹⁰

De Quincey's bifurcation of the field of letters is seen to rest squarely on his distinction between the lower and the higher faculties of knowledge—between the discursive understanding and the feelings. In this context he reserves the term "knowledge" for the product of the lower faculty. Knowledge is such truth as can be apprehended by the discursive intellect; it is information; it is science. Power, on the other hand, as De Quincey proceeds to tell us, is *deep sympathy with truth*; and the truth in question is a higher kind of truth than knowledge. It is "never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds: it exists eternally by way of germ or latent principle in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed, but never to be planted."¹¹ Together with the idea that knowledge is something novel, that needs to be planted, there belongs the idea that it is always subject to revision or addition, and that its literature accordingly is impermanent as compared with the literature of power:

. . . The very highest work that has ever existed in the Literature of Knowledge is but a *provisional* work: a book upon trial and sufferance Let its teaching be even partially revised, let it but be expanded,—nay, even let its teaching be but placed in a better order,—and instantly it is superseded. Whereas the feeblest works in the Literature of Power, surviving at all, survive as finished and unalterable amongst men. For instance, the *Principia* of Sir Isaac Newton was a book *militant* on earth from the first. In all stages of its progress it would have to fight for its existence: 1st, as regards absolute truth; 2dly, when that combat was over, as regards its form or mode of pre-

¹⁰ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 54-55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

senting the truth. And as soon as a La Place, or anybody else, builds higher upon the foundations laid by this book, effectually he throws it out of the sunshine into decay and darkness Now, on the contrary, the Iliad, the Prometheus of Aeschylus, the Othello or King Lear, the Hamlet or Macbeth, and the Paradise Lost, are not militant, but triumphant for ever as long as the languages exist in which they speak or can be taught to speak

All the literature of knowledge builds only ground-nests, that are swept away by floods, or confounded by the plough; but the literature of power builds nests in aerial altitudes of temples sacred from violation, or of forests inaccessible to fraud. *This* is a great prerogative of the *power* literature; and it is a greater which lies in the mode of its influence. The *knowledge* literature, like the fashion of this world, passeth away. An Encyclopaedia is its abstract; and, in this respect, it may be taken for its speaking symbol—that before one generation has passed an Encyclopaedia is superannuated; for it speaks through the dead memory and unimpassioned understanding, which have not the repose of higher faculties, but are continually enlarging and varying their phylacteries. But all literature properly so called—literature κατ' ἐξοχην,—for the very same reason that it is so much more durable than the literature of knowledge, is (and by the very same proportion it is) more intense and electrically searching in its impressions.¹²

These paragraphs constitute a kind of peroration to the 1848 passage, and are couched in a language which in itself is as much one of power as of knowledge.

It is to be noted that in the final sentence De Quincey substitutes the phrase "all literature properly so called" for the term "the literature of power." Although he has spoken of literature as a single social organ having the two offices of power and knowledge, he is unwilling in the end that the word should be employed to designate other books than those of power, thus returning in effect to his position of 1823. Must we then say that his recognition of a literature of knowledge represents no more than a compromise with popular terminology? Or is the literature of knowledge to be discriminated from mere books of knowledge?

Doubtless De Quincey's terminology in 1848 may be regarded as a concession to popular usage, but it is not merely such. De Quincey is distinguishing more sharply than before between the varieties of books of knowledge. The parlia-

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 57-59.

mentary Blue Books are one thing, Newton's *Principia* is another. And it seems to be suggested that the difference resides in the fact that the Blue Books are related only to a local or professional interest, whereas the *Principia* is related to a general and common interest of man. But this distinction between that which is in no sense of the word literature and that to which the name "literature of knowledge" may be extended, at least by courtesy, is only incidental in the context. De Quincey's real concern is not with the elements which the literature of knowledge and the literature of power possess in common, which render the two literatures one social organ, but with the points of difference; his basic interest is in clarifying the idea of literature as a fine art.

In his view the literature of power is a fine art; the literature of knowledge is not. This he makes abundantly clear not only in the 1823 definition but in his paper on Oliver Goldsmith, written in the same year as the essay on Pope:

... Literature, provided we use that word not for the mere literature of knowledge, but for the literature of power—using it for literature as it speaks to what is genial in man, viz. to the human *spirit*, and *not* for literature (falsely so called) as it speaks to the meagre understanding—is a fine art: and not only so; it is the supreme of the fine arts; nobler, for instance, potentially, than painting, or sculpture, or architecture.¹³

... literature, in its more genial functions, works by the very same organs as the liberal arts, speaks to the same heart, operates through

¹³ "Oliver Goldsmith," IV, 308. De Quincey gives three reasons for the view that "Literature is more potent than other fine arts." It is so "because deeper in its impressions according to the usual tenor of human sensibilities; because more *extensive*, in the degree that books are more diffused than pictures or statues; because more *durable*, in the degree that language is durable beyond marble or canvas, and in the degree that vicarious powers are opened to books for renewing their phoenix immortality through unlimited translations: powers denied to painting except through copies that are feeble, and denied to sculpture except to casts that are costly" (*ibid.*, pp. 309-310). The word "translations" evidently carries a meaning here that is different from the commonest one—that a book exists in a particular language and is inaccessible to those who do not speak that language except through a translation (which is necessarily inferior to the original) is a *limitation* of literature as compared to the other arts. De Quincey's meaning is either that books may exist in many copies, or that their content is passed on through other writers.

the same compound nature, and educates the same deep sympathies with mysterious ideals of beauty. *There* lies the province of the arts usually acknowledged as fine or liberal: *there* lies the province of fine or liberal literature.¹⁴

Literature, it would appear, sometimes fails to be recognized as one of the fine arts—no doubt for the reason that much which goes by its name is not art, or is impurely art. It is this state of affairs that De Quincey would remedy by distinguishing sharply between the literature that is art and the literature that is not. Hence his desire not to confuse the situation once again by applying the term "literature," in its philosophical sense, to both the literature of power and the literature of knowledge.

De Quincey has acknowledged the fact that the two functions of knowledge and power "may blend and often *do so*." He devotes a footnote to the proposition that it is this fact which is responsible for the common confusion of the two literatures:

. . . the reason why the broad distinctions between the two literatures of power and knowledge so little fix the attention lies in the fact that a vast proportion of books,—history, biography, travels, miscellaneous essays, &c.,—lying in a middle zone, confound these distinctions by interblending them. All that we call "amusement" or "entertainment" is a diluted form of the power belonging to passion, and also a mixed form; and, where threads of direct *instruction* intermingle in the texture with these threads of *power*, this absorption of the duality into one representative *nuance* neutralises the separate perception of either. Fused into a *tertium quid*, or neutral state, they disappear to the popular eye as the repelling forces which, in fact, they are.¹⁵

Here we find a truly surprising admission: namely, that "a vast proportion of books" lie in a middle zone between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. This would seem to rule out the possible usefulness of De Quincey's bifurcation of the field of letters as a method of *practical* classification, leaving it only the value of a distinction in principle. But our immediate concern is with the problem this note raises as to which, after all, are the books that go to make up the literature of knowledge. "History, biography,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹⁵ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 59 n.

travels, miscellaneous essays, &c.": are not these the "books of much higher pretensions" of the 1823 definition which it has been natural to assume constitute the literature of knowledge? Yet here they are described as hybrid.

It is not that one challenges the claim of these books to communicate power as well as knowledge. But if they are not, on the whole, representative of the classes of books which De Quincey has in mind when he speaks of the literature of knowledge, we may well ask what can be the books that are in his mind.

In principle it is not difficult to distinguish between the four classes of books that emerge from De Quincey's discussion: books of such specialized knowledge or information of local interest as constitute subliterate, books of pure knowledge which stand in some relation to a general interest of man, books of mixed knowledge and power, and books of power. Practically, all kinds of difficulties arise when we attempt to fit particular books into the classification. The *Principia* and the works of La Place are the only examples that De Quincey names in this context of the literature of (pure) knowledge. He would no doubt have been willing to count as further examples all works of theological, philosophical, and scientific speculation not too specialized in content and approach to be of general interest—*The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Kant's Critiques, or *The Wealth of Nations*, for instance. But although it would seem to be such works as these which fit De Quincey's none too explicit definition of the works of knowledge, it is probable that much of the time, in this and in other contexts where reference is made to the literature of power as distinguished from that of knowledge, De Quincey has in mind the hybrid books. For though he regards power as a more potent thing than knowledge, he is zealous to guard the preserves of power from any assimilation that might obscure their clear outlines, and therefore tends to dispose of this "vast proportion of books . . . lying in a middle zone" by forcing them into the lower category. That this is so is abundantly clear from the 1823 passage. And, once ruled out of the domain of power, the

hybrids, by reason of their great number and their high importance, easily come to be foremost in thought when the literature of knowledge is contrasted to that of power.¹⁶

So much by way of analysis of what De Quincey means by the "literature of knowledge" and the "literature of power." But what of the value of the distinction? Critics in general have tended to accept the principle of the distinction as true and valuable, yet of late there have been dissenting voices. Thus it is the opinion of Fowler that it is neither sound nor very helpful, but on the contrary is irrelevant and positively harmful.¹⁷ Hudson records his agreement with this point of view.¹⁸

Fowler's discussion suffers from an inexact reading of De Quincey's definitive statements. He is not very sure what De Quincey means by "the literature of knowledge." He would like to believe that the category is intended to include only books of pure information. The classification into works of power and works of knowledge would then be identical with "the distinction drawn by Charles Lamb—between real books and books that are only books in name or in outward appearance, *Biblia A-biblia*."¹⁹ That distinction he regards as vital. Only he feels that if this is what was meant, De Quincey should have refused the name of literature altogether to the books of knowledge. But he is troubled

¹⁶ When, on occasion, De Quincey does refer to such forms as history and biography as belonging to literature in the stricter sense, he betrays extreme reluctance in doing so: "... to say the truth, in its own nature neither history nor biography, unless treated with peculiar grace, and architecturally moulded, has any high pretension to rank as an organic limb of literature. The very noblest history, in much of its substance, is but by a special indulgence within the privilege of that classification. Biography stands on the same footing" (*The Posthumous Works of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by Alexander H. Japp [London, 1891-93] [hereafter referred to as *Posthumous Works*], I, 305). Here again, as in the early part of the 1823 account of literature, distinction of form, of style, is referred to as the criterion of a work of literature proper.

¹⁷ John Henry Fowler, "De Quincey as Literary Critic," *The English Association Pamphlets*, No. 52 (London, 1922), p. 5.

¹⁸ Hoyt Hopewell Hudson, "De Quincey on Rhetoric and Public Speaking," in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans* (New York, 1925), p. 150.

¹⁹ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

because, although confused about the matter (and attributing the confusion entirely to De Quincey), he perceives that it is intended that works of higher pretensions should be classified as works of knowledge. For Fowler such works as *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* and *The Wealth of Nations* are works of power, and he is apparently unwilling to admit that they would not be for De Quincey. He gives no sign of realizing that he is assuming a different conception of power from De Quincey's. Ultimately his criticism of De Quincey's distinction between the two kinds of literature reduces to a rejection of the distinction between the two modes of apprehension—discursive and intuitive—or at least to a denial of its importance.

There are several objections to De Quincey's famous distinction which, in the opinion of the present writer, are valid enough. As has been seen, De Quincey's definition of the literature of knowledge is none too exact. Admittedly he is somewhat inconsistent in terminology. Admittedly, also, a bifurcation of the field of letters which leaves a vast proportion of books stranded in a sort of no man's land only to be disposed of by a somewhat arbitrary assignment to one category rather than the other is scarcely satisfactory as a practical classification.

Furthermore, there is one fairly obvious criticism to be made of the knowledge—power antithesis even when regarded as a tool for philosophical analysis and not as a basis for a practical classification of books. This is that the elements of the antithesis are somewhat less "fitted for reciprocal repulsion" than De Quincey insists.

Speaking of the intermingling of the threads of instruction and power in books of mixed character, he asserts that "Fused into a *tertium quid*, or neutral state, they disappear to the popular eye." Doubtless they do, as separately conceived entities, but the analogy is misleading. If the situation were one of opposite forces neutralizing each other, the result would be no force at all—no knowledge and no power. It may be questioned whether there is the inherent antagonism

between the functions that De Quincey would make out. In his zeal to differentiate them he postulates an opposition which is belied by the facts and which accentuates the difficulty of explaining hybrid works. He is led astray as well by a native liking for defining the elements of a contrast as polar opposites. If, as he concedes, the functions of knowledge and power do blend in a vast proportion of books, the conclusion would appear to be irresistible that there is a natural affinity between them rather than a natural repulsion. And yet it must be granted that when the two functions tend to be of equal importance in any given case, there is repulsion of a sort, and confusion. One or the other ought always to be primary.

A still further criticism would be that De Quincey shows an unfortunate tendency to depreciate the literature of knowledge. The extent of his depreciation is somewhat surprising. Thus he speaks of "the pre-eminency over all authors that merely *teach* of the meanest that *moves*, or that teaches, if at all, indirectly *by moving*."²⁰

Of course it is the intensity of his concern to extol power, as well as to set it off as something completely distinct, that leads De Quincey to adopt, in the contexts we have been considering, so mean a view of knowledge—of discursive knowledge, at least. He tends to take knowledge in the sense of mere information, and the knowledge process as mechanical. He appears to ignore the analytic and synthetic activity of the mind involved in the discovery or reception of knowledge, and also the excitement, both intellectual and emotional, to which the knowledge process can lead.

But, granting the validity of these several criticisms, the present writer would maintain that the general principle of distinction which De Quincey enunciates has both validity and importance. Possibly De Quincey would have been on safer ground had he differentiated not simply between knowledge and power, but between the kind of excitement and power which can arise from the exercise of the discursive

²⁰ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 57.

intellect and that kind which arises from the arousal of the feelings. This is really to suggest the desirability of a more adequate theory of knowledge—and of an improved terminology. But, whatever the limitations of his theory and his terminology, he gave emphatic expression to a distinction that is real. There is undeniably a difference between such works as *Paradise Lost* and *Hamlet* on the one hand and such works as the *Principia* and *The Wealth of Nations* on the other, a difference in the modes of their operation on our minds if not in their ultimate effect. To recognize and to define this difference is an essential step in any thorough-going analysis of what literature is and how it functions, taking literature either in the broad sense or in the narrow; and it is of peculiar value if the place of literature, or of one variety of literature, as one of the fine arts is to be satisfactorily defined. We do not, after all, regard the *Principia* and other works of its kind as specimens of fine art, and if the relationship of literature to the arts is to be made clear it is important to lay down a principle by which it can be explained why some works of literature are indubitably works of art and why others are not. We should not expect De Quincey's demarcation between two varieties of literature to abolish the practical confusions inherent in the situation of literature itself—in the fact that much of it is a mixture of things. We should, on the other hand, recognize the philosophical importance of the distinction.

Any critic who tends to depreciate the distinction on the ground that it is obvious fails to take into consideration the fact that it was far from obvious at the time that De Quincey enunciated it. Miss Darbishire states the case well when she says that the value of De Quincey's reflections upon the theory of literature is apt to be overlooked because "they often rest upon ideas which in our day have become common-places."

. . . We do not now need to be told that literature is a fine art and must be criticized as such, nor that books are of two kinds, those that communicate knowledge and those that communicate power. Yet in De Quincey's day these ideas were by no means commonly understood

or accepted, and it is his distinction to have set forth with clearness and force a theory which Coleridge only vaguely implied, and Wordsworth never elaborated in writing.²¹

We have already seen that De Quincey acknowledges his indebtedness to Wordsworth for the antithesis between power and knowledge as a principle of distinction between literature and nonliterature. Wordsworth has a footnote to his Preface of 1800 in which he states that "much confusion has been introduced into criticism by . . . [the] contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science."²² But, as Bernbaum points out, De Quincey made a valuable extension into the field of prose of the distinction which Coleridge and Wordsworth had established between the poetical and the unpoetical.²³ It is indeed a novel feature of De Quincey's expositions of his distinction that, in omitting any reference to poetry as distinguished from prose or to the poetical as distinguished from the unpoetical, he steers clear of establishing any ties between the literature of power and poetry and the literature of knowledge and prose. Perhaps the fact that he was not himself a poet but a writer of "impassioned prose" partly determined his choice of a terminology that does not involve reference to poetry. But it is not alone impassioned

²¹ *De Quincey's Literary Criticism*, edited by H. Darbishire (London, 1909), p. 31. One may further quote, as bearing closely upon the situation, certain sentences that De Quincey himself wrote in a different context of thought: "Yet, so easy is it to imagine, after a meaning is once pointed out, and the station given from which it shows itself as the meaning—so easy, under these circumstances, is it to imagine that one has, or that one could have, found it for one's self—that I have little expectation of reaping much gratitude for my explanation The very success with which I should have accomplished the task . . . were the very grounds of my assurance that the service would be little valued In such a case, I have known a man of the very greatest powers mistake the intellectual effort he had put forth to apprehend my elucidation, and to meet it half way, for his own unassisted conquest over the difficulties; and . . . I have had, perhaps, to stand, as an attack upon myself, arguments entirely and recently furnished by myself" ("Autobiography," II, 96-97).

²² *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Alexander B. Grosart (London, 1876) (hereafter referred to as *Prose Works*), II, 86.

²³ Ernest Bernbaum, *Guide through the Romantic Movement* (New York, 1930), p. 415.

prose that he would admit to the domain of power. He expressly instances "the commonest novel"—and the novel is a genre for which he had little respect—as a work of power,²⁴ and in so doing he clearly goes a step beyond Coleridge and Wordsworth in their liberation of the idea of poetry or the poetical from the idea of metrical composition. It may be questioned, however, whether he can be credited with more than an effectual unfolding of their thought.

In *The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt* Miss Elisabeth Schneider raises the question whether De Quincey did not derive his knowledge—power classification from Hazlitt.²⁵ The passage of Hazlitt's upon which she chiefly bases her suggestion unquestionably contains a striking parallel to De Quincey's idea: ". . . science depends on the discursive or *extensive*—art on the intuitive and *intensive* power of the mind In fact, we judge of science by the number of effects produced—of art by the energy which produces them. The one is knowledge—the other power."²⁶ Miss Schneider neglects to quote the middle sentence in this passage, the weakest part of the parallel. It seems impossible to deny the probability that, if this statement of Hazlitt's came to De Quincey's attention, it made some contribution to the genesis of the distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. But to say that is not to acquiesce in Miss Schneider's somewhat different proposition that "De Quincey was indebted to Hazlitt for something of his view of 'power' in literature."²⁷ An examination of what Hazlitt intends by "power" in the different contexts, including the above, in which he employs the term leads one to doubt whether his concept is at all close to De Quincey's. Hazlitt's idea of power appears to contain as its major components the meanings which, in the next section, we shall rule out as not being sensibly present in De Quincey's concept.

²⁴ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 57.

²⁵ *The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt* (Philadelphia, 1933), p. 45 n.

²⁶ *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (New York, 1902-1904), IX, 489-490. The passage appeared in an article in *The Morning Chronicle* in 1814.

²⁷ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 118 n.

II. THE NATURE OF POWER

We turn now to a more careful examination of De Quincey's concept of power as the definitive effect wrought by literature and the fine arts in general. The basis for such an examination has been laid in Chapter II, in the analysis of his conception of the feelings and their relation to knowledge. For power, we have seen, is an affair of the feelings (the literature of power "must operate . . . on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering *iris* of human passions, desires, and genial emotions"—through "affections of pleasure and sympathy"²⁸), and a mode of realizing truth.

It may help to clear the ground if we notice first of all two possible interpretations of power as an effect mediated by an appeal to the feelings, interpretations which are not De Quincey's, or which, at least, are distinctly not in the line of his main thought. They are views having considerable prominence in the history of criticism. One is the theory of purgation, the other the theory of wish-fulfillment.

That De Quincey was aware of the unhealthfulness of the suppression of the emotions is seen from a statement in his essay entitled "Casuistry": "Morbid suppression of deep sensibilities must lead to states of disease I speak not of any physical sensibilities, but of those which are purely moral—sensibilities to poetic emotions, to ambition, to social gaiety, or to impassioned and exalted love."²⁹ Yet except for one glancing mention of the idea, he does not anywhere refer to literature as a vehicle for the release or purification of feelings or passions; but, as we shall find, he tends instead to regard literature as arousing sensibilities which might otherwise atrophy from want of attention.³⁰ The single

²⁸ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 55.

²⁹ VIII, 349.

³⁰ Wordsworth, it will be recalled, spoke in the Preface of 1800 of the value of poetry as a means of arousing men from "savage torpor." The idea was no new one with the Romantics. The theory that art, especially tragedy, is valuable as a means of arousing men from unhealthful ennui was emphasized by the Abbé du Bos in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (Paris, 1770). (See especially Part I, Sec. I ff.) Before Du Bos,

exception is in a passage in a letter to his son Francis, "On the Religious Objections to the Use of Chloroform" (1849). In speaking of Milton as having remarkably anticipated the Hahnemann doctrine of homeopathy in his preface to *Samson Agonistes*, he states that

. . . really the Miltonic Hahnemannism is more satisfactory than the Miltonic criticism upon Grecian Art. Those difficult questions that arise upon the Greek ideas of Tragedy are but grazed or ruffled upon the surface Neither is the introduction of this medical digression, after all, so violent an intrusion as one imagines beforehand. It arises naturally enough upon the well-known but obscure passage in Aristotle ascribing to Tragedy the office of purifying the passions by ministrations of pity and terror. The first demur of any note upon this passage is—"How?—purify a passion *by a passion?*" "Why, yes!—even so," is virtually Milton's reply. It seems a strange rationale of medical practice; but in effect it is the very logic Nature prompts us to in the treatment of our own bodily morbid affections.³¹

The final sentence one takes to be a paraphrase of Milton rather than De Quincey's own declaration, which interpretation renders his remarks entirely noncommittal, if not skeptical of the theory of purgation. One might expect that the suggestiveness and notoriety of the Aristotelian passage would have provoked analysis of the concept in one of the several contexts in which De Quincey discusses the theory of Greek tragedy, but it did not. The idea, apparently, did not strike fire in his mind, or connect itself in any way with his own conception of the *exercise* of the sensibilities.

Perhaps it is only because of the ambiguous meaning of such words as "feelings," "passions," and "sensibilities" that

Addison (*The Spectator*, Nos. 411-412) had recommended pleasures of the imagination, especially those originating in novelty, as a means of awakening the faculties from "sloth and idleness," and of taking off from "that satiety we are apt to complain of." Aristotle, Hobbes, and Hume are other names that might be mentioned in connection with this idea. Perhaps no one has expressed the undesirability of dormant sensibilities more vigorously and succinctly than Hobbes, when he declared, "For as to have no Desire is to be Dead: so to have weak passions, is Dulnesse . . ." (*The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, edited by Ferdinand Tönnies [Cambridge, 1928], I, vii, 2). (Note supplied by C. D. T.)

³¹ XIV, 288-289.

one is at all led to suppose that De Quincey could have adhered to any doctrine of purgation—and held the view which he does hold of power and the feelings as concerned with the apprehension of truth. The ambiguity is one which creeps into his own use of the words, but we may say definitely that whenever his usage is most precise the feelings or sensibilities are distinctly more than mere emotions or passions, precisely because they are forms of intuition.

Another and more modern theory of the action of art upon the feelings is that it consists in imaginary wish-fulfillment, with consequent escape from unsatisfactory reality. Is there anything in De Quincey to countenance the idea that the effect of power consists in such satisfaction of desires and feelings? There is only one clear passage, and that concerns the end sought by readers of novels:

. . . They [especially young women] seek an imaginary world where the harsh hindrances which in the real one too often fret and disturb the "course of true love" may be forced to bend to the claims of justice and the pleadings of the heart What they are striving after, in short, is to realize an ideal, and to reproduce the actual world under more harmonious arrangements.³²

But De Quincey viewed novels as a distinctly mean and inferior type of literature. He tells us, for example, that storytelling "is a function of literature neither very noble in itself, nor, secondly, tending to permanence."³³ "Rapid reading . . . belongs to the vulgar interest of a novel."³⁴ It is true that even the commonest novel is a work of power, which "by moving in alliance with human fears and hopes, with human instincts of wrong and right, sustains and quickens those affections."³⁵ But wish-fulfillment is here but one factor among several, and, in any event, the end sought lies beyond it.

Elsewhere De Quincey speaks of the taste of young and commonplace readers as being for literature in which all the situations reproduce their own hopes and prospects:

³² "On Novels," XIV, 371.

³³ "Letters to a Young Man," X, 39.

³⁴ "Oliver Goldsmith," IV, 297.

³⁵ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 57.

. . . The meditative are interested by all that has an interest for human nature; but what cares a young lady, dreaming of lovers kneeling at her feet, for the agitations of a mother forced into resigning her child? or for the sorrow of a shepherd at eighty parting for ever amongst mountain solitudes with an only son of seventeen . . . ?⁸⁶

May we not say that De Quincey views imaginary wish-fulfillment as an incidental function which literature sometimes performs, and in the performance of which power may be realized? Surely his statements do not support the notion that wish-fulfillment is itself a serious function of literature, or is ever really to be identified with power. We see from the last passage above that the sensibilities over which he regarded literature as exercising power—or should we say out of which it creates a sense of power?—are those which bring man into sympathy with a world of experience far larger than that of his personal desires. If the concept of desires or wishes is to be extended to cover all experiences in which human beings find satisfaction in imaginative or vicarious participation, the theory of wish-fulfillment becomes too obviously true to have important meaning. Works of art of course fulfill a need or desire, else why should they exist? But the problem is to define this general need or desire.

Having now dismissed the idea that power for De Quincey is something that consists in the sense of release from suppressed feelings, or in escape from recalcitrant reality, we turn to his own positive definitions. All of them, it may be remarked, are themselves written in the language of power, rather than in precise conceptual terms. We notice first the definition contained in the 1823 account:

. . . Now, if it be asked what is meant by communicating power, I, in my turn, would ask by what name a man would designate the case in which I should be made to feel vividly, and with a vital consciousness, emotions which ordinary life rarely or never supplies occasions for exciting, and which had previously lain unawakened, and hardly within the dawn of consciousness—as myriads of modes of feeling are at this moment in every human mind for want of a poet to organize them? I say, when these inert and sleeping forms *are* organized, when these

⁸⁶ "On Wordsworth's Poetry," XI, 304.

possibilities *are* actualized, is this conscious and living possession of mine *power*, or what is it?³⁷

Power, it appears, is the effect or state which follows upon the excitation of certain feelings. But so far one might be tempted to think that the feelings are mere rare emotions—of the eccentric and peripheral sort which romantics are sometimes accused of seeking and exploiting. But De Quincey continues:

When, in *King Lear*, the height, and depth, and breadth, of human passion is revealed to us, and, for the purposes of a sublime antagonism, is revealed in the weakness of an old man's nature, and in one night two worlds of storm are brought face to face—the human world, and the world of physical nature . . . when I am thus suddenly startled into a feeling of the infinity of the world within me, is this power, or what may I call it? Space, again what is it in most men's minds? The lifeless form of the world without us, a postulate of the geometrician, with no more vitality or real existence to their feelings than the square root of two. But if Milton has been able to *inform* this empty theatre, peopling it with Titanic shadows . . . so that, from being a thing to inscribe with diagrams, it has become under his hands a vital agent on the human mind,—I presume that I may justly express the tendency of the *Paradise Lost* by saying that it communicates power³⁸

Those emotions or feelings the conscious possession of which is power are rare—in that they are all too seldom awakened by the routine of everyday life; but they are not eccentric or esoteric. They are revelations or intuitions of “the infinity of the world within me”—the full range of human passions and values, the forms of the world of nature being used, at least in certain instances, as symbols evocative of these intuitions. In short, they are intuitions of the sublime. It is apparent, although not made explicit here, that the feelings in question are excited by means of idealized representation—in other words, that the principle of *idem in alio* explains the mechanism or process of the experience. The feelings are latent in the minds of all; literature's function is to actualize them. So far as this passage is concerned, actualization appears to be an end in itself.

There is something extremely suggestive to the imagina-

³⁷ “Letters to a Young Man,” X, 48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

tion in De Quincey's assertion that myriads of modes of feeling are at this moment hardly within the dawn of consciousness, for want of a poet to organize them. This statement is characteristic of his sense of the infinity of that which is yet unknown or unexplored in all fields of human experience—in sensation, in moral insight, in ideas.³⁹ His use of the word "organize," as an alternative for "awaken" or "actualize," is an interesting anticipation of the use of the same term by I. A. Richards and other critics of today, although it is perhaps doubtful how much of the modern content of meaning it held for him. His emphasis is primarily upon the idea of excitation, and he is usually content to assume the feelings excited as entities which already exist. His concern is with their final nature and value, rather than with the mode of their formation, as will be made abundantly clear when we consider the paucity of his remarks on the creative faculty. Yet the concept of combination (surely much the same thing as organization) is, in the abstract, an important one in his thought: "It is not, it has not been, perhaps it never will be, understood—how vast a thing is combination."⁴⁰

Had De Quincey developed the idea of the identity which he implies between awakening feelings and organizing them, we should have been less troubled by the tendency of such words as "feelings" and "emotions," both in his own mind and in ours, to revert to the simple meaning of mere emo-

³⁹ Equally characteristic is his statement that "the awful passion of cold which for some years haunted the . . . process of laying aside the opium" was a "revelation of powers so unsearchably new lurking within old affections so familiarly known as cold. Upon the analogy of this case it might be suspected that nothing whatever had yet been truly and seriously felt by man; nothing searched or probed by human sensibilities to a depth below the surface. If cold could give out mysteries of suffering so novel, all things in the world might be yet unvisited by the truth of human sensations. All experience worthy of the name was perhaps yet to begin" ("National Temperance Movements," XIV, 275-276).

⁴⁰ *Posthumous Works*, II, 62. Elsewhere he speaks of the "power of vast combination" as the "distinguishing principle of Coleridge's conversation" ("Coleridge and Opium-Eating," V, 204), and of the "infinite and electrical power of combination" which belongs to a great scholar ("Joan of Arc," V, 406).

tions. Unless we are careful always to maintain an awareness of the complexity of his real conception of feeling, we are likely to put the question whether literature can indeed rightly be said to leave our minds in a state of aroused feeling, whether such a state is a satisfactory final one. Is not the mere emotional charging of the mind a cause of distress—unless or until the energy generated is somehow either put at rest or utilized? To attempt an answer to such questions will be to complete our understanding of De Quincey's conception.

It will become clear from our analysis of the 1848 definition of power that De Quincey does not rely upon the response to power in the field of external action to explain the beneficence of the sense of power itself; the energy stirred in our minds by literature may indeed find expression in the life of action, but the experience of power is complete in itself, quite apart from subsequent effects. Such a conclusion indicates that the "modes of feeling" an awareness of which is power are not mere strong emotions, but are organized and stable effects. This, of course, is implicit in the idea that they are forms of revelation or intuition, an idea that must constantly be borne in mind. But further evidence as to the harmony of experience which is their final reality is found in De Quincey's insistence, in various contexts, upon peace or repose as the final effect of great poetry or art:

... In all poetic enthusiasm, however grand and sweeping may be its compass, so long as it is healthy and natural, there is a principle of self-restoration in the opposite direction; there is a counter-state of repose, a compensatory state, as in the tides of the sea, which tends continually to re-establish the equipoise. The lull is no less intense than the fury of commotion.⁴¹

... We may observe that poets of the highest class, whether otherwise delighting or not in the storm and tumultuous agitation of passion, whether otherwise tragic or epic in the constitution of their minds, yet, by a natural instinct, have all agreed in tending to peace and absolute repose as the state in which only a sane constitution of feelings can finally acquiesce. And hence, even in those cases where the very

⁴¹ "Notes on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits: Keats*," XI, 380 n.

circumstances forbade the absolute tranquillity of happiness and triumphant enjoyment, they have combined to substitute a secondary one of resignation.⁴²

Peace, then, severe tranquillity, the brooding calm . . . is the final key into which all the storms of passion modulate themselves in the hands of great poets.⁴³

. . . that *repose* necessary as the final impression of any great work of art.⁴⁴

It is true that De Quincey fails in any place explicitly to integrate this view of repose as the final impression of a work of art with his definitions of power, but the integration is easy enough to make and may be regarded as implicit in his thought. Because of the treacherous equivocation of the word "feeling" or "feelings," one might believe that De Quincey tended to think often in terms of the excitation of mere strong emotion,⁴⁵ but, inasmuch as his ultimate conception of the "modes of feeling" aroused by literature was of modes of emotional insight into the world of reality, it may

⁴² "Dr. Samuel Parr," V, 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁴⁴ "Letters to a Young Man," X, 45 n.

⁴⁵ In so far as he does so, and views the final effect produced as one of repose, his view might be interpreted to involve a closer approach to the notion of purgation than we have surmised. De Quincey's ideas of repose offer an interesting contrast to Wordsworth's thought on the same subject. De Quincey is basically psychological in his explanation: it is the way of the mind to return to peace after storm; the ebb and flow of passion in art correspond to the rise and subsidence of emotion in life. Wordsworth's view has more of a moral cast, with, of course, due recognition of the influence of nature. In the "Ode to Duty" the peace Wordsworth celebrates lies in willing subjection to the great Lawgiver; in "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle" the poet has found calm through hope and trust emerging from humanizing distress; in "Brougham Castle," Clifford's feelings have been softened and soothed through human love and contact with nature; in "Elegiac Verses" and elsewhere repose has come by way of release of pain through natural beauty. De Quincey, it is true, admits the moral route to tranquillity, but only as a secondary mode. He is not concerned with nature as a way to repose. De Quincey, one may remark, is the nearer to Aristotle in his thought. His contention that "absolute repose" is "the state in which only a sane constitution of feelings can finally acquiesce" recalls Aristotle's definition of pleasure as "a kind of motion of the soul, and a settling, sudden and sensible, into our proper nature" (*The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, translated by Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb [Cambridge, 1909], I, xi, 1, p. 46). (Note supplied by C. D. T.)

be assumed that his concept of literature as feelings that have been organized or combined would imply a reposeful effect.

It may be said that the 1823 definition of power is in purely psychological terms. That of 1848 is for the most part in ethical terms. Power is here first defined as deep sympathy with truth, and then the ethical effect of children upon society is instanced as an example of what De Quincey means by such sympathy with truth:

. . . there is a rarer thing than truth,—namely, *power*, or deep sympathy with truth. What is the effect, for instance, upon society, of children? By the pity, by the tenderness, and by the peculiar modes of admiration, which connect themselves with the helplessness, with the innocence, and with the simplicity of children, not only are the primal affections strengthened and continually renewed, but the qualities which are dearest in the sight of heaven,—the frailty, for instance, which appeals to forbearance, the innocence which symbolises the heavenly, and the simplicity which is most alien from the worldly,—are kept up in perpetual remembrance, and their ideals are continually refreshed. A purpose of the same nature is answered by the higher literature, viz. the literature of power . . . What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge, of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe is *power*,—that is, exercise and expansion to [*sic*] your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite, where every pulse and each separate influx is a step upwards, a step ascending as upon a Jacob's ladder from earth to mysterious altitudes above the earth.⁴⁶

To be made to feel such emotions as pity, tenderness, and admiration is to have one's "primal affections" renewed and strengthened, one's awareness of the highest values ("qualities . . . dearest in the sight of heaven") refreshed—and this "exercise and expansion" of the "latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite" is power. Truth and the infinite are one.

It may seem that, writing in 1848, De Quincey has in mind a conception of power which differs somewhat from the one of twenty-five years earlier. It is at first a little difficult to accept the "primal affections" as identical with "emotions which ordinary life rarely or never supplies occasions for exciting." Yet we have seen in Chapter II that psychological reality is for him ultimately the same as moral

reality, but that he employs different vocabularies to describe what he means by the infinite or "the vision of life"—sometimes a purely psychological one, sometimes an ethical or even theological one, sometimes one of a symbolism drawn from nature. And we can feel sure that he not only thinks of the primal affections as being all too seldom excited by everyday life, but that he regards such awareness of them as life does evoke as but the faintest adumbration of their full reality.

It is clear that De Quincey identifies the true and the good in much the same way that Keats identifies the true and the beautiful, and that he holds the function of literature to be that of communicating a profoundly emotional awareness of what is at once the true and the good:

Were it not [the 1848 passage continues] that human sensibilities are ventilated and continually called out into exercise by the great phenomena of infancy, or of real life as it moves through chance and change, or of literature as it recombines these elements in the mimicries of poetry, romance, &c., it is certain that, like any animal power or muscular energy falling into disuse, all such sensibilities would gradually droop and dwindle. It is in relation to these great *moral* capacities of man that the literature of power, as contradistinguished from that of knowledge, lives and has its field of action. It is concerned with what is highest in man; for the Scriptures themselves never condescended to deal by suggestion or co-operation with the mere discursive understanding: when speaking of man in his intellectual capacity, the Scriptures speak not of the understanding, but of "*the understanding heart*,"—making the heart, *i.e.* the great *intuitive* (or non-discursive) organ, to be the interchangeable formula for man in his highest state of capacity for the infinite.

Here in this statement, already noticed in Chapter II, is De Quincey's most explicit identification of profound feeling with the highest form of cognition, and of the infinite (the object of cognition through feeling) with moral reality or the world of values. Literature is an instrument for the emotional realization of ideals and values.

. . . Tragedy, romance, fairy tale, or epopee, all alike restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution, which else (left to the support of daily life in its realities) would languish for want of sufficient illustration. What is meant, for instance,

by *poetic justice*?—It does not mean a justice that differs by its object from the ordinary justice of human jurisprudence; for then it must be confessedly a very bad kind of justice; but it means a justice that differs from common forensic justice by the degree in which it *attains* its object, a justice that is more omnipotent over its own ends, as dealing—not with the refractory elements of earthly life, but with the elements of its own creation, and with materials flexible to its own purest pre-conceptions. It is certain that, were it not for the Literature of Power, these ideals would often remain amongst us as mere arid notional forms; whereas, by the creative forces of man put forth in literature, they gain a vernal life of restoration, and germinate into vital activities.⁴⁷

From the 1848 account of power it is clear that literature is to be regarded as an agency of the good life. But it is important to remember De Quincey's special conception of the good life. There is little to show that he thinks of it in terms of outward acts. He speaks, it is true, of the forces or power generated by literature as germinating into vital activities, and he brings the 1848 passage to a close with these sentences:

... The directions in which the tragedy of this planet has trained our human feelings to play, and the combinations into which the poetry of this planet has thrown our human passions of love and hatred, of admiration and contempt, exercise a power for bad or good over human life that cannot be contemplated, when stretching through many generations, without a sentiment allied to awe. And of this let every one be assured—that he owes to the impassioned books which he has read many a thousand more of emotions than he can consciously trace back to them. Dim by their origination, these emotions yet arise in him, and mould him through life, like forgotten incidents of his childhood.⁴⁸

"The Poetry of Pope," XI, 56-57. The same conception of the exercise of the moral sensibilities by literature is restated in the *Posthumous Works*: ". . . above all the action upon women's hearts in the enormous expansion given by the relation to their own children, develops a feeling of tenderness that afterwards sets the model for the world, and would die away, or freeze, or degenerate, if it were generally balked. Now just such an action has tragedy, and if the sympathy with calamities caused to noble natures by ignobler, or by dark fates, were never opened or moved or called out, it would slumber inertly, it would rust, and become far less ready to respond upon any call being made. Such sensibilities are not consciously known to the possessor until developed" (I, 294).

"The Poetry of Pope," XI, 59-60. It is interesting that De Quincey

Clearly he recognizes, or, indeed, insists on, the impact of literature upon life. But he does not dwell on this; instead he characteristically views the experience induced by literature as complete in the sense of aroused awareness of values. The reason is not difficult to find: it lies in his preoccupation with thoughts and feelings as themselves essentially constitutive of the good life.⁴⁹ The external life of man offers relatively few opportunities for actualization of the possibilities of the human spirit. The more significant actualization is in the internal acts, and, as will be recalled, "the true internal *acts* of moral man are his thoughts, his yearnings, his aspirations, his sympathies or repulsions of heart. This is the life of man as it is appreciable by heavenly eyes."⁵⁰ The fundamental purpose, then, of the literature of all ages is to exercise "a deep control over the modes of thinking and feeling in each successive generation."⁵¹ It is in this sense that the ultimate purpose of the fine arts is "the exaltation of our human nature."⁵²

Only in the light of De Quincey's identification of the good life with the life of feeling can the true nature of his theory of literature as power be understood. Failure to lay due emphasis on the identification is bound to result in a distorted conception of his view of literature as a moral force, and to obscure certain of the ideas he stresses most—for instance, the idea that literature does not teach in any ordinary sense of the word. Simpler moralistic theories of literature—theories according to which goodness consists in good actions of an external sort—are prone to assume that literature instructs and admonishes. But if goodness resides primarily in the life of profound feeling, it is the feelings rather than the intellect or the will which must be appealed to. Thus it

here appears to recognize that the effect of literature—of some literature—may be a bad effect. His more ordinary assumption appears to be that literature which stirs our feelings at all is so far good—that the sensibilities stirred possess absolute goodness.

⁴⁹ See *supra*, p. 50.

⁵⁰ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 80.

⁵¹ "Johnson's Life of Milton," IV, 115.

⁵² Footnote to the "Laocoon," XI, 173.

is that De Quincey denies that it is the function of the higher literature to instruct, that he insists that it is differentiated from the literature of knowledge precisely in that it does not instruct. "To address the *insulated* understanding," he tells us, "is to lay aside the Prospero's robe of poetry."⁵³

... Poetry, or any one of the fine arts (all of which alike speak through the genial nature of man and his excited sensibilities), can teach only as nature teaches, as forests teach, as the sea teaches, as infancy teaches,—viz. by deep impulse, by hieroglyphic suggestion To teach formally and professedly is to abandon the very differential character and principle of poetry. If poetry could condescend to teach anything, it would be truths moral or religious. But even these it can utter only through symbols and actions.⁵⁴

A poem may announce a moral, as does *Paradise Lost*, but the moral itself teaches "only by diffusing its lesson through the entire poem in the total succession of events and purposes: and even this succession teaches it only when the whole is gathered into unity by a reflex act of meditation."⁵⁵

All moralistic theories of art, even a theory such as De Quincey's, in which morality is primarily a matter of deep feeling, raise the problem of the type of subject matter and of treatment which is consistent with moral effect. It is true that the criteria of what is good in feeling are probably less rigid than those of what is good in action, and that a literature which seeks to communicate emotional awareness of values is less subjected to restrictions than one which aims at direct inculcation of moral ideas. Certainly De Quincey suffers from no such obsession with the idea of the necessity of representing only or chiefly the ideal as do Tolstoy and Ruskin, for example. Poetry is for him "the science of human passion in all its fluxes and refluxes—in its wondrous depths below depths, and its starry altitudes that ascended to the gates of heaven."⁵⁶ The mystery of sin or evil is as revela-

⁵³ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 89.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89. Elsewhere De Quincey speaks of the formal statement of the moral in *Paradise Lost* as a memorable exception to the rule that a moral must be "immanent" not "transient" ("Milton *versus* Southey and Landor," XI, 454–456).

⁵⁶ "Recollections of Hannah More," XIV, 117.

tory of moral reality as is the mystery of holiness; indeed, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, he holds that it is through the concept of sin that its antithesis holiness has come to be comprehended. Yet he does impose certain restrictions not only on a writer's treatment of his subject but upon that subject matter itself.

No poetry, he tells us, concerns itself with "total anomalies"—with the monstrous or the abnormal; it deals instead with "the catholic and the representative."⁵⁷ He criticizes Pope's female portraits, first on the ground that they are

. . . delineations of impossible people; and, secondly, (as to the value), that, if after all they could be sworn to as copies faithful to the originals, not the less are they to be repelled as abnormal, and so far beyond the intelligibilities of nature as practically to mean nothing, neither teaching nor warning.⁵⁸

And Goethe—who was, however, the victim of De Quincey's intensest prejudice—is chided for the representation of the abnormal in *Wilhelm Meister*: "Here let us pause one moment to point the reader's attention to Mr. Goethe, who is now at his old tricks,—never relying on the grand high-road sensibilities of human nature; but always traveling into by-paths of unnatural or unhallowed interest."⁵⁹ Earlier in the paper on *Wilhelm Meister* there is a more general declaration of principle:

. . . we presume that in all latitudes and under every meridian a poet stands amenable to criticism for the quality of his sentiments and the passions he attributes to his heroes, heroines, and "pattern people." That the general current of feeling should be deeper than that of ordinary life, nobler, and purer,—is surely no unreasonable postulate: else wherefore is he a poet. Now, within a short compass there is no better test by which we can try the style and tone of a poet's feelings than his ideal of the female character as expressed in his heroines. For this purpose we will have a general turn-out and field-day for Mr. Goethe's ladies.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 76.

⁵⁸ "Lord Carlisle on Pope," XI, 128. It is not uncharacteristic of De Quincey that he should here compromise with principle by employing such words as "teach" and "warn." He is given to such momentary lapses.

⁵⁹ "Goethe as Reflected in His Novel of *Wilhelm Meister*," XI, 247.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

But the test of what is moral reduces to a test of what is essentially true, and it is less the representation of what is immoral that De Quincey objects to than it is the representation of the untrue or abnormal. Speaking at once of literature and life, he states that

. . . Napoleon and Lord Byron have done more mischief to the moral feelings, to the truth of all moral estimates, to the grandeur and magnanimity of man, in this present generation, than all other causes acting together. But how? Simply by throwing human feelings into false combinations. Both of them linked the mean to the grand, the base to the noble, in a way which often proves fatally inextricable to the poor infirm mind of the ordinary spectator . . . Here is Lord Byron connecting, in the portrait of some poor melodramatic hero possibly, some noble quality of courage or perseverance with scorn the most puerile and senseless. Prone enough is poor degraded human nature to find something grand in scorn; but, after this arbitrary combination of Lord Byron's, never again does the poor man think of scorn but it suggests to him moral greatness, nor think of greatness but it suggests scorn as its indispensable condition.⁶¹

That De Quincey may err in his refusal to accept scorn as a quality consistent with greatness and in the general theory of association here suggested is beside the point: his basic criticism is of the falsification of moral relationships.

It may seem that in considering De Quincey's pronouncements on the relationship between literature and morality we have traveled far from the original definition of power as the excitation of sleeping modes of feeling, and it is true in a sense that we have done so. But that is only to say that when De Quincey passes from purely psychological concepts and a psychological vocabulary to ethical concepts and terms the atmosphere of his ideas is altered, whatever the underlying identity for his mind of psychological and ethical reality. And, in particular, when the adjective "moral" and the noun "morals" are employed, he, in common with all other thinkers, tends to think more narrowly and negatively than at other times. Language itself has a way of shrinking ideas. But we may say that it is not at all for his statements concerning literature and morality that De Quincey's thought is highly signifi-

⁶¹ *Posthumous Works*, I, 292-293.

cant or suggestive. His ethical passages are important as an interpretation of the psychological ones, but it is the latter which best succeed in communicating a positive understanding of his concept of power. It is when he speaks of the actualization or organization of modes of feeling, or the "infinity of the world within me," or of the "vision of life" with its horror and sweetness, that our imaginations rise to an adequate understanding of what he has basically in mind; it is then also that his expression, if not his thought, is most original.

De Quincey's identification of moral exaltation with deep sympathy with truth—of the true itself with the good—is of course a characteristic expression of the general romantic tendency to identify absolute values. But his theory is anomalous in that it does not go on to an unequivocal identification of the true and the good with the beautiful—the logical resting place of the romantic theory of art. And it is out of this anomaly that the general paradox of De Quincey's theory of literature arises. If literature, as one of the fine arts, is a form of the beautiful, as he everywhere assumes it to be, and if its function is power, and power is sympathy with truth, and truth is the moral infinite, then beauty itself should be an agency of sympathy with the ultimate. It was made clear in the preceding chapter that some of the time De Quincey does conceive of the beautiful as an image of the ideal or as an agency for the apprehension of it. But it was also made clear that he does not always so conceive of it, that, rather, he sometimes thinks of the beauty of art as consisting in workmanship which exists for its own sake, or as a fountain, not of power, but of intellectual pleasure. This inconsistency in his view of the beautiful and of art is, of course, our primary concern throughout this study, but mention of it is especially relevant here because the difference between his theory of literature, even of his theory of literature as power, and the theories of his contemporaries is to be explained largely in terms of it.

The many-sidedness of De Quincey's vocabulary—the easy convertibility of his theory of power from psychological terms

into metaphysical and into ethical ones—in itself serves to make apparent the affinities of his theory. When he expresses his view in the vocabulary of feeling, its relation to the general romantic cult of feeling stands in clear relief. When he expresses it in terms which define literature as a higher type of knowledge, it relates itself at once to the other intellectualistic theory of his time, in particular to that of Coleridge. When he expresses it in ethical terms, it is brought into relation with not only most other romantic theory but also the more purely moralistic theories of an earlier and a later day. The various affinities are in one sense almost too easy to discern, too numerous and too incompletely defined by the language of power which De Quincey's various forms of expression constitute, to make either practicable or fruitful a detailed analysis of them. It is evident that the theory of literature as power is one variant of a basic conception which informs the ideas of all the romantic critics and philosophers, and which may be named the romantic theory of art or of poetry. This conception is one of the high rôle of the poet as philosopher, priest, or prophet, and of poetry itself as having the practical power of enlarging and ennobling the being of man and the power of communicating knowledge of spiritual reality. As Miss Powell states, ". . . no more inspiring conception of poetry [than that] has ever been developed; for these poets their work was the sublimest of all human activities."⁶²

What Miss Powell further concludes—that poetry was not for the romantics an activity *sui generis*, but rather the highest form either of knowledge or of action—is peculiarly true of De Quincey in so far as he is a romantic, in so far, that is to say, as his theory of power is concerned. This is so because he failed more than did most of his fellow romantics in effecting a harmonious adjustment between aesthetic theory in the narrow sense—the theory of the formal beauty of art—and the theory of art as higher knowledge and as power. It is peculiarly true in spite of the fact that he insists

⁶² A. E. Powell, *The Romantic Theory of Poetry: An Examination in the Light of Croce's Aesthetic* (London, 1926), p. 14.

more than anyone else upon the abstract principle of the identification of substance and form in the higher types of literature. But it is untrue of him in so far as he adheres in paradoxical fashion to a different theory of art, to the theory which makes not power but the intellectual pleasure derived from the process of art or from formal beauty an adequate end in itself.

Further exploration of the central paradox in De Quincey's thought must be left for later chapters. We shall end the present section with an analysis of the particular affinity of his theory of power which is the closest and the most instructive—its affinity with Wordsworth's view of poetry.

It is to Wordsworth, as we have seen, that De Quincey acknowledges his indebtedness for the antithesis of knowledge to power as an expression of the distinction between "anti-literature" and literature proper. Wordsworth's one distinctive use of the term "power" in his critical writings⁶³ is not

* The use occurs in the Preface of 1815. Wordsworth is objecting to

"... that inversion in the order of things whereby a passive faculty [Taste] is made paramount among the faculties conversant with the fine arts. Proportion and congruity, the requisite knowledge being supposed, are subjects upon which taste may be trusted; it is competent to this office;—for in its intercourse with these the mind is *passive*, and is affected painfully or pleasurably as by an instinct. But the profound and the exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination; or, in ordinary language, the pathetic and the sublime;—are neither of them, accurately speaking, objects of a faculty which could ever without a sinking in the spirit of Nations have been designated by the metaphor—*Taste*. And why? Because without the exertion of a cooperating *power* in the mind of the Reader, there can be no adequate sympathy with either of these emotions: without this auxiliary impulse, elevated or profound passion cannot exist.

"Passion, it must be observed, is derived from a word which signifies *suffering*; but the connection which suffering has with effort, with exertion, and *action*, is immediate and inseparable To be moved, then, by a passion, is to be excited, often to external, and always to internal, effort: whether for the continuance and strengthening of the passion, or for its suppression, accordingly as the course which it takes may be painful or pleasurable. If the latter, the soul must contribute to its support, or it never becomes vivid,—and soon languishes, and dies. And this brings us to the point. If every great poet with whose writings men are familiar, in the highest exercise of his genius, before he can be thoroughly enjoyed, has to call forth and to communicate *power*, this service, in a still greater degree, falls upon an original writer, at his first appearance in the world Is it to be supposed that the reader can make progress [in the apprehension and

such as to accord precisely with De Quincey's use of it, but that is a detail of small importance. It is impossible for any reader acquainted with the Prefaces of Wordsworth, in particular with the Preface of 1800, not to hear echoes of Wordsworth's own statements about poetry throughout De Quincey's passages on literature as power. There is not mere parallelism or identity of conception; there is a striking similarity in vocabulary as well. Wordsworth, like De Quincey, speaks of the excitation of feeling, of "the essential passions of the heart," of "our elementary feelings," of the strengthening and purification of the affections of the reader. His statement that the object of poetry is truth "carried alive into the heart by passion" is one that De Quincey might have made in so many words. The same thing is true of the famous definition of poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge."

De Quincey and Wordsworth are in complete agreement as to the essential function of literature: for both it can be defined as moral exaltation and as spiritual enlargement through emotional realization of the highest truth.⁶⁴ The

realization of new subjects and effects], like an Indian prince or general—stretched on his palanquin, and borne by his slaves? No; he is invigorated and inspirited by his leader, in order that he may exert himself; for he cannot proceed in quiescence, he cannot be carried like a dead weight. Therefore to create taste is to call forth and bestow power, of which knowledge is the effect . . . " (*Prose Works*, II, 127–128).

According to this, power is a form of activity or effort which a writer must arouse or create in the reader as a means to the realization of his intended effects. It is not itself sympathy with truth, but an exertion prerequisite to such sympathy.

"The affinity of De Quincey's view to Keats's may be noted at this point. Keats, of course, identifies truth with beauty, as De Quincey does not, and De Quincey explicitly defines the communication of deep sympathy with truth in ethical terms, as Keats does not; but both view the end of literature as the emotionalized, intuitive, communication of the highest truth. What Professor C. D. Thorpe says of Keats applies equally well to De Quincey: "With Keats the object of poetry is to interpret, to give the sense of the inner mystery of life and nature that we may know them in their essential qualities, not as science presents them but, as Matthew Arnold suggests, by awakening in us 'a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them and our relations with them'" (*The Mind of John Keats* [New York and London, 1926], p. 200).

Very striking, moreover, is the parallelism between De Quincey and Keats

originality of De Quincey's definitions of literature may be said to lie in the overtones of his thoughts when he speaks in what we have called his psychological vocabulary. His apparently unique sense of the word "power" is one such detail. His "modes of feeling . . . of the infinity of the world within me," while convertible into the idea of the moral sensibilities, suggests more than the alternative phrase. And his idea of truth itself and of the modes of its revelation differs somewhat in its specific content from Wordsworth's. It can be said that De Quincey tends to be obsessed with the idea of the infinite variety and complexity of human experience, and that for him it is an aroused awareness of the illimitable in this sense that most effectually constitutes an awakening of the moral sensibilities. Wordsworth is more given to the discernment of truth in the simple human emotions. There is a parallel contrast (as has been indicated in Chapter II) in their characteristic ways of finding truth revealed in the world of nature, nature being for De Quincey an unimaginably complex system of hieroglyphics, but for Wordsworth a more direct and simple, although mysterious, revelation of spiritual reality. De Quincey's "vision of life" appears to be a more awesomely intricate one than Wordsworth's, more essentially composed of violently contrasting elements existing at once in awful antagonism and profound union. It is fascinating to speculate as to what differences there would be in De Quincey's descriptions of power if as a boy he had not come so strongly under the influence of

in their conception of the necessary part played by evil and suffering in awakening the mind to a realization of ultimate truth. To quote Professor Thorpe again concerning Keats's view: ". . . since it is in the darkest, most tragic and miserable hours of life that the soul of man approaches nearest to infinite and god-like capacities, then that poet understands most of all that is desirable-to-know who has probed to the depths the most profound misery, pain, and heartbreak of the great suffering heart of humanity" (*ibid.*, p. 190). De Quincey does not approach the conception from the point of view of the poet specifically, but his account of the function of suffering in the "Suspiria de Profundis" and his definition of the idea of sin as the only key to a feeling of the infinite are abundant evidence of the essential identity of his thought.

Wordsworth's poetry and ideas. One is inclined to think that they would have been developed almost entirely in a purely psychological language, as is the description of 1823, without much coloration by ethical terms. This is not to say that his identification of the true and the good would have been conceived of in a more purely psychological way. But there is no ultimate lack of harmony between the way in which his mind, when most freely its native self, tended to conceive of reality and Wordsworth's somewhat different way. We may regard De Quincey's descriptions of power as extending the basic conception common to his thought and Wordsworth's, or as applying it in a special method corresponding to his own unique feeling for the realities of experience. This unique feeling, which may be described as centering about a different conception of the sublime or the infinite, doubtless received reënforcement from his experience with the sensations and dreams of opium, but it can hardly be thought to have been created by opium. Even in early childhood De Quincey was given to dreams of a similar sort of sublimity and was deeply impressed by the operation in his own experience of what he calls the law of antagonism.

Most men, we may surmise, have a tendency to define literature in terms of the nature and purposes of the literature they themselves produce or might produce. Wordsworth's theory of poetry is no doubt a rationale of his own experience as a poet and of the product of his art. Often his statements about poetry are qualified in such a way as to indicate his consciousness of this fact. De Quincey's descriptions of power are more sweeping in their claims of universality, but we can recognize the most suggestive and original statements in them as descriptive of the kind of effects he himself achieves in his imaginative writings—and, indeed, in these very definitions themselves, for they are imaginative writing and evoke a feeling of power at the same time that they constitute small specimens of the literature of knowledge on the subject of power. On the whole, they are more important as power than as knowledge, for they are unique in

their effect on the feelings, but not at all unique in the basic formulae to which most of their ideas are reducible.

One principal difference between De Quincey's literary theory and that of Wordsworth and Coleridge is that De Quincey occupies himself almost exclusively with an analysis of final effects, assuming or ignoring for the most part the process and the agencies by which power is communicated. One result of this is that he tends to value literature almost entirely as communication rather than as expression as well. He makes only one reference, and that is incidental to an explanation of mediocrity in poetry, to the motives which impel the writer to creation:

. . . Even at . . . [an] early age I was keenly alive . . . to the fact that by far the larger proportion of what is received in every age for poetry, and for a season usurps that consecrated name, is *not* the spontaneous overflow of real unaffected passion, deep, and at the same time original, and also forced into public manifestation of itself from the necessity which cleaves to all passion alike of seeking external sympathy: this it is *not*; but a counterfeit assumption of such passion . . . Rarely, indeed, are the reputed poets of any age men who groan, like prophets, under the burden of a message which they have to deliver, and *must* deliver, of a mission which they *must* discharge.⁶⁵

Here, after echoing Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry, he proceeds to suggest an auxiliary explanation of the poet's motivation—and then what may be regarded as a more or less distinct third explanation. The explanations are not incompatible, but they are somewhat detached. The impulse to share one's feeling of sympathy with truth is one thing; to deliver a message (for the effect it will have) is really another.

There is a final relation of De Quincey's theory of power to Wordsworth's poetic theory which it will be well to notice before passing on to an analysis of such statements as De Quincey does make about the creator of literature and the creative faculty itself. It was pointed out in the preceding chapter that there is one passage in which De Quincey suggests a synthesis of the two functions of power and pleasure

⁶⁵ "Autobiography," I, 193-194.

as manifested in literature. The essential statement is that "not pleasure, but the sense of power and the illimitable incarnated as it were in pleasure, is the true object of the Fine Arts."⁶⁶ This is by no means a satisfactory explanation of the relation of power and pleasure, for it does not make clear the organic connection between them, the sense in which the one is incarnated in the other. We know that for De Quincey power exists apart from art: it can be an effect of life itself. Similarly we know that on some occasions at least he regards the pleasure of art as capable of existing apart from truth and as an end in itself. When power and pleasure are united, is there no more than a happy mixture of the two things? There is surely an implication of more, but no analysis of it. But the point of interest at present is that De Quincey's suggestion of the relationship of power and pleasure is another echo of Wordsworth's thought. Wordsworth discusses at some length the relation of pleasure to the poetic experience:

... The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure

Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgment of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgment the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathise with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone.⁶⁷

The pleasure Wordsworth speaks of here is not simply that delight which the mind takes in the form of poetry; it is a pleasure in the act of apprehending the objects which poetry

⁶⁶ "Lessing's *Laocoon*," XI, 173 n.; see *supra*, p. 102.

⁶⁷ Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), *Prose Works*, II, 89-90.

represents as well. But the pleasure of style is recognized as a thing in itself:

. . . Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely—all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. This effect is always produced in pathetic and impassioned poetry; while, in lighter compositions, the ease and gracefulness with which the Poet manages his numbers are themselves confessedly a principal source of the gratification of the Reader.⁶⁸

Here is a rationale of the instrumentality of pleasure such as De Quincey nowhere gives, but such as he doubtless would approve; here also is an acknowledgment of the pleasure of style as an end in itself in one class of compositions, which is precisely what we find in De Quincey. What we have described as the central paradox of De Quincey's thought is by no means peculiar to him; it exists also in Wordsworth. But it is far more developed in De Quincey for the reason that, on the one hand, he is far more interested than Wordsworth in the classes of compositions in which style is a primary concern, and, on the other, he goes further than Wordsworth in maintaining the idea of style as the very incarnation of thought in the loftier classes of writing. Thus the paradox is sharpened, and literature for De Quincey falls more definitely into two divisions determined by the preponderance of intellectual pleasure or of power which a work affords. One cannot rest satisfied with such a bifurcation (which, put alongside the category of the literature of knowledge would seem to result in three classes). Nor, for that matter, can one be satisfied with Wordsworth's explanation of the instrumentality of the pleasure of style, which we may assume that De Quincey would have set forth also had he offered any explanation. The formal beauty of literature is surely some-

⁶⁸ *Prose Works*, II, 96-97.

thing more than a bait, or a counterbalance to pain. At least it ought to be more for a romantic. Unless it is, form and matter stand in no organic relation to each other; there appears to be no revelation of truth or goodness in the beauty of art itself.

III. THE CREATIVE FACULTY

We have seen that De Quincey concerns himself very little with an analysis of the motives which underlie the creation of the literature of power, with the creative faculty itself, or with the creative process. His only direct statement concerning the motivation of the poet has already been presented, on page 144. It is proposed in this section to examine such of his pronouncements as exist on the creative faculty and process. It will be convenient to approach these under the two heads: (1) his ideas of genius, (2) his ideas of the imagination.

A. GENIUS

In a footnote to the passage in which he indicates the incentives of the poet De Quincey gives one of his two extended comments on the subject of genius. He has said that poetry which, in spite of being, often, the accepted poetry of its day, is not the spontaneous overflow of unaffected and original passion and which does not carry the burden of a message that must be spoken, is a poetry of mere talent, not one "of original power, of genius, or authentic inspiration." His footnote is an attempt to define the differences between talent and genius:

Talent and *genius* are in no one point allied to each other, except generically—that both express modes of intellectual power. But the kinds of power are not merely different, they are in polar opposition to each other. *Talent* is intellectual power of every kind, which acts and manifests itself by and through the *will* and the *active* forces. *Genius*, as the verbal origin implies, is that much rarer species of intellectual power which is derived from the genial nature—from the spirit of suffering and enjoying—from the spirit of pleasure and pain, as organised more or less perfectly; and this is independent of the will. It is a function of the *passive* nature. Talent is conversant with the adaptation of means to ends. But genius is conversant only with

ends. Talent has no sort of connection, not the most remote or shadowy, with the *moral* nature or temperament—genius is steeped and saturated with this moral nature.

There follows a postscript:

This was written twenty years ago. Now (1853), when revising it, I am tempted to add three brief annotations:—

1. It scandalises me that, in the occasional comments upon this distinction which have reached my eye, no attention should have been paid to the profound suggestions as to the radix of what is meant by *genius* latent in the word *genial* It is clear that from the Roman conception (whencesoever emanating) of the natal Genius, as the secret and central representative of what is most characteristic and individual in the nature of every human being, are derived alike the notion of the *genial* and our modern notion of *genius* as contradistinguished from *talent*.

2. As another broad character of distinction between *genius* and *talent*, I would observe—that *genius* differentiates a man from all other men; whereas *talent* is the same in one man as in another: that is, where it exists at all, it is the mere echo and reflex of the same talent, as seen in thousands of other men, differing only by more and less, but not at all in quality. In genius, on the contrary, no two men were ever duplicates of each other.

3. All talent, in whatsoever class, reveals itself as an effort—as a counteraction to an opposing difficulty or hindrance; whereas genius universally moves in headlong sympathy and concurrence with spontaneous power. Talent works universally by intense resistance to an antagonist force, whereas genius works under a rapture of necessity and spontaneity.⁶⁹

Genius, says De Quincey, is a species of intellectual power derived from "the genial nature," which is "the spirit of suffering and enjoying . . . as organised more or less perfectly." That it is so derived he thinks is shown by the derivation of the word itself—a not too convincing argument.⁷⁰ But what, more precisely, is this genial nature or spirit of

⁶⁹ "Autobiography," I, 194-195.

⁷⁰ In a portion of the postscript to his footnote omitted above he even carries the etymological interpretation further: "genial" and "genius" (in the sense we are concerned with) are taken to derive in turn from the notion of an indwelling natal genius who is the representative of what is uniquely individual. But, throughout, De Quincey makes his theory of derivation conform to his analysis of meaning. If he had chanced to emphasize the idea of genius as a divine or demoniac madness, doubtless he would have put his finger on a different derivation—the genius as the demon.

suffering and enjoying? Is it not what De Quincey usually calls simply the feelings, or at any rate the organized system of the feelings? This would seem to be established by his definition of the literature of power, in the essay on Oliver Goldsmith, as the literature which "speaks to what is genial in man, viz. to the human *spirit*" as opposed to "the meagre understanding."⁷¹ Genius, then, is an intellectual power which rests upon a capacity of deep feeling. This is what we should expect to be De Quincey's view, at least in so far as genius is to be identified with the faculty which creates the literature of power; for the power felt by the reader is the communication or overflow of that felt by the writer.

But to say that genius is a power derived from the power of feeling is not to offer an adequate explanation of it. The power to feel, however deeply and comprehensively, is hardly in itself a definition of genius. Nor do the further notions De Quincey presents in his footnote contribute much to an adequate idea of genius. They are all corollaries of the initial definition we have examined. For the feelings, we have learned, are for De Quincey moral in their very nature; they are ends in themselves; and they are passive in the sense of being spontaneous, which is the meaning he here intends (they are not the product of effort, as is a reasoned conclusion). Their uniqueness is an idea which has yet to be fully explored, but it is implicit in what De Quincey has said of the literature of power (that is, of the feelings) as a literature in which no work is ever superseded. These various considerations may serve to differentiate genius from talent, but they leave its real nature still in the dark.

We turn to the second of De Quincey's major statements concerning genius as distinguished from talent, and find a somewhat more suggestive analysis:

... What seems *really* open to proof is that men of genius have a larger *capacity* of happiness,—which capacity, both from within and from without, may be defeated in ten thousand ways. This seems involved in the very word *genius*. For, after all the pretended and hollow attempts to distinguish genius from talent, I shall continue to

⁷¹ "Oliver Goldsmith," IV, 308.

think (what heretofore I have advanced) that no distinction in the case is tenable for a moment but this: viz. that genius is that mode of intellectual power which moves in alliance with the *genial* nature—i.e. with the capacities of pleasure and pain,—whereas talent has no vestige of such an alliance, and is perfectly independent of all human sensibilities. Consequently, genius is a voice of breathing that represents the *total* nature of man, and therefore his enjoying and suffering nature, as well as his knowing and distinguishing nature; whilst, on the contrary, talent represents only a single function of that nature. Genius is the language which interprets the synthesis of the human spirit with the human intellect, each acting through the other; whilst talent speaks only from the insulated intellect. And hence also it is that, besides its relation to suffering and enjoyment, genius always implies a deeper relation to virtue and vice; whereas talent has no shadow of a relation to *moral* qualities any more than it has to vital sensibilities. A man of the highest talent is often obtuse and below the ordinary standard of men in his feelings; but no man of genius can unyoke himself from the society of moral perceptions that are brighter, and sensibilities that are more tremulous, than those of men in general.⁷²

What is most helpful here is the statement that genius "is the language which interprets the synthesis of the human spirit with the human intellect, each acting through the other." This is entirely harmonious with the earlier definition of genius as an intellectual power derived from the genial nature, but it is an advance in that it gives more adequate recognition to the intellectual element, or at least makes more clear what is meant by an intellectual power. Inasmuch as De Quincey sometimes refers to the feelings themselves, or to their organ, the understanding heart, as a mode—indeed the highest mode—of intellect, one could not be sure from the earlier passage just what content should be read into the idea of an intellectual power, whether, that is to say, more was present than sensibility itself regarded as a mode of intuition. But here it is clear that man's "knowing and distinguishing nature" definitely enters into the synthesis with the feelings. It might be said that on this occasion De Quincey's thought is at once more clear and more adequate since he does not identify concepts merely because they are closely related. He does not blur the import of the words "intel-

⁷² "Notes on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits: Keats*," XI, 382-383.

lect" and "sensibilities," but lets each stand for its customary meaning while asserting that the respective faculties are integrated into a totality of nature. Similarly, he does not identify the sensibilities and the moral perceptions—suffering and enjoyment on the one hand and virtue and vice on the other—though we can be sure that he regards feeling as inseparable from moral perception. Had he always thus resisted the romantic temptation to call intimately related ideas by each other's names, to speak the language of power rather than that of knowledge, his descriptions of power would be less baffling. In the present definition of genius he speaks a language that carries a fairly clear understanding to the discursive intellect.

Though given, on occasion, to preoccupation with the element of feeling as the essential one in genius, De Quincey by no means denies what, in the ordinary sense of the word, we may call the intellectual side. This is made still more clear in a third statement in which he contrasts genius with talent. We quote here only the most relevant part: ". . . genius is intellectual power impregnated with the *moral* nature, and expresses a synthesis of the active in man with his original organic capacity of pleasure and pain. Hence the very word *genius*, because the *genial* nature in its whole organization is expressed and involved in it."⁷³ Here the intellect is recognized as something active, which in itself is distinct from, although it enters into synthesis with, the moral nature or the feelings, which are passive. If challenged here, De Quincey would surely need to concede that genius, as the expression of the synthesis, is at once active and passive, not passive merely, as asserted in the first passage examined. But still there is no real account of genius in its active capacity—as that which does or makes something—nor is there any such account to be found in De Quincey.

We have so far taken the genial nature to be the equivalent of the sensibilities and the moral nature, and there does appear to be such an equivalence of idea in De Quincey's

⁷³ "London Reminiscences," III, 34 n. Here, again, De Quincey does identify the moral nature with the sensibilities.

mind on some occasions—those in which, as a result of his preoccupation with the feeling nature, he is inclined to make feeling inclusive of all: of sensibility itself, of moral perception, of intellectual apprehension, and even of action. But in the statement last noticed it appears that the genial nature is not merely the capacity of pleasure and pain, or the moral nature, but is the totality of the human mind. And genius is that which expresses the totality of the human mind acting as a unity, the intellect and the feelings moving in unison and interacting with each other. This is a profound conception, and stands in striking antithesis to the view that genius is a form of freakish or asymmetrical development. For De Quincey, genius would appear to be the profoundly normal, not the abnormal.⁷⁴

It remains to notice more particularly De Quincey's insistence upon the uniqueness of genius, an idea reiterated in numerous places: "... genius is always peculiar and individual";⁷⁵ "... all genius implies originality, and sometimes uncontrollable singularity, in the habits of thinking, and in the modes of viewing as well as estimating objects";⁷⁶ "Genius is the language which interprets the synthesis of the human spirit with the human intellect, each acting through the other";⁷⁷ "... genius may be defined in the severest manner as *that which is generally characteristic*."⁷⁸ All of this is for De Quincey a direct consequence of the fact that genius is intellectual power moving in alliance with the sensibilities. In other words, men differ in their feelings and in the combinations of their thoughts and feelings.

This insistence upon the uniqueness of genius is apparently sound, but one could wish for a better rationale of it. The explanation just given is hardly adequate, for under its terms one might say that every man is unique, and genius

⁷⁴ But De Quincey exhibits his characteristic inconsistency when, after stating that Lamb had nothing of the epic intellect, he writes: "Here, as happens sometimes to men of genius preternaturally endowed in one direction, he [Lamb] might be considered as almost starved" ("Charles Lamb," V, 236).
⁷⁵ "London Reminiscences," III, 35 n.

⁷⁶ "Notes on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits*," XI, 351.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

⁷⁸ *Posthumous Works*, I, 304.

therefore only accidentally so. It may be that De Quincey was held back from an exploration of the implications of the concept of the uniqueness of genius by an unconscious awareness of the difficulties that would arise in reconciling the uniqueness of every communication of power with the universality he attributes to the truths which, through the offices of sympathy, are the source of power.

We shall now compare De Quincey's concept of genius with others current in his day. It is furthest removed from a rather vague notion which prevailed in certain quarters of eighteenth-century thought—in the mind of Sir Joshua Reynolds, for example—and which, oddly enough, was destined to receive definitive expression in a phrase of Carlyle's: "genius—the transcendent capacity of taking trouble."⁷⁰ This conception surely runs counter to the idea of spontaneity, and, in general, ignores the distinction between genius and talent.

De Quincey's view differs also from that which conceives of genius as a form of divine possession, and which rationalizes itself by what is perhaps a much sounder historical interpretation of the word than his. The idea that the genius is a sort of inspired madman has been a recurrent one since Plato's time. It is expressed by Seneca, by Dryden, by Shaftesbury. This mystical interpretation received, of course, its most definite development in eighteenth-century Germany, and gave the alternate designation *Geniezeit* to the *Sturm und Drang* period. A typical statement of the German conception is that of Johann Lavater, who calls genius "the torch of the universe, the salt of the earth, the substantive in the grammar of humanity, the image of divinity, creator, destroyer, revealer of the secrets of God and men, guide of nature, prophets, priests and kings . . . super-Nature, super-Art, super-Learning, super-Talent, self-life . . . [whose] way is the way of lightning, or storm-wind or eagle," at the path of whose passage "we gaze with amazement," hearing its rush or seeing its majesty,

⁷⁰ *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great*, in *Carlyle's Complete Works* (New York: National Book Company, 1890), Book IV, Chap. iii, p. 329.

but not knowing "the whither or whence of its going" or finding "the print of its feet."⁸⁰ Such a conception naturally led, on the one hand, to a worship of genius and, on the other to a fetish for untrammelled self-expression. Carlyle and Byron are respectively the leading English exemplars of the two tendencies.

There is little of all this in De Quincey. His definition is in psychological terms and carries virtually no suggestion of the supernatural. High as he conceives the poet's function to be, he engages in no worship of the poetic power. He tends to exalt the effect achieved by poetry, not the poet as an individual. Above all, he does not look upon the poet as one charged with the expression of the ego. Yet there are common elements in the German view and in De Quincey's. Both exalt genius over talent, both stress spontaneity, and both regard genius as unique.

There were simpler concepts of the originality of genius current in the eighteenth century. Dennis defines genius as "the expression of a furious joy caused by the conception of an extraordinary hint,"⁸¹ and, as H. G. Paul points out, he stood before his age "as the champion of emotion as the basis of poetry."⁸² This emphasis on feeling is closer to De Quincey's theory than are the ideas of Gerard and Blair. Gerard's *Essay on Genius* (published 1774) is the most ambitious disquisition of the century on the subject. It defines genius as "properly the faculty of *invention*; by means of which a man is qualified for making new discoveries in science, or for producing original works of art."⁸³ Blair, in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (published 1783), says that genius imports "something inventive or creative."⁸⁴ He is concerned with differentiating it from taste rather than from

⁸⁰ Laurie Magnus, *A Dictionary of European Literature* (London and New York, 1926), p. 289.

⁸¹ Preface to the "Remarks on Prince Arthur," quoted in Harry Gilbert Paul, *John Dennis: His Life and Criticism* (New York, 1911), p. 133.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁸³ Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (London, 1774), p. 8.

⁸⁴ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Philadelphia, 1833), p. 29.

talent. Wordsworth's idea of genius follows in this tradition: "Of genius the only proof is, the act of doing well what is worthy to be done, and what was never done before Genius is the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe: or, if that be not allowed, it is the application of powers to objects on which they had not before been exercised, or the employment of them in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown."⁸⁵ These definitions say nothing of the feelings as components of genius, and perhaps for this very reason the concept they represent is less limited than De Quincey's, which does not clearly allow for scientific genius. When Wordsworth speaks of genius in art, he clearly implies the operation of feeling: "Of genius, in the fine arts, the only infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility."⁸⁶ And his definitions of the poet are of course entirely harmonious with De Quincey's conception—were indeed, we may feel sure, the principal formative force acting upon it.

It remains to compare De Quincey's idea of genius with that of Coleridge. At the close of one of his footnotes on the talent-genius distinction, De Quincey says, "I am the more proud of this distinction since I have seen the utter failure of Mr. Coleridge, judging from his attempt in his 'Table-Talk.'"⁸⁷

There are in the *Table Talk* some half dozen comments on genius, but De Quincey's reference must be presumed to be to one or both of the following:

. . . In the present age, it is next to impossible to predict from specimens, however favourable, that a young man will turn out a great poet, or rather a poet at all. Poetic taste, dexterity in composition, and ingenious imitation, often produce poems that are very promising in appearance. But genius, or the power of doing something new, is another thing⁸⁸

⁸⁵ "Poetry as a Study" (1815), *Prose Works*, II, 127-128.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ "Recollections of Charles Lamb," III, 35.

⁸⁸ *Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, &c.*, edited by Hartley N. Coleridge (London, 1894) (hereafter referred to as *Table Talk*), April 18, 1830, p. 69.

. . . Talent, lying in the understanding, is often inherited; genius, being the action of reason and imagination, rarely or never.⁸⁹

The first of the two remarks expresses De Quincey's idea of talent precisely, but the bare statement that genius is the power of doing something new—an echo of the tradition described above—obviously would seem inadequate to him. The definitive phrases in the second are in agreement with his own distinction, except that he does not connect the term "imagination" with the idea of genius—why, it is difficult to say. We surmise that De Quincey regarded Coleridge's statements as failing to establish the true distinction because they do not employ the idea of the "genial nature" or refer specifically to the sensibilities. It is evidently in his approach to definition through an interpretation of the term "genial" that De Quincey took most pride.

But the parallels between Coleridge's utterances on genius, if we consider the entire sum of them, and De Quincey's are impressive. There is a passage in the *Biographia Literaria* which treats sensibility as a component of genius:

. . . Sensibility indeed, both quick and deep, is not only a characteristic feature, but may be deemed a component part, of genius. But it is not less an essential mark of true genius, that its sensibility is excited by any other cause more powerfully than by its own personal interests; for this plain reason, that the man of genius lives most in the ideal world, in which the present is still constituted by the future or the past; and because his feelings have been habitually associated with thoughts and images, to the number, clearness, and vivacity of which the sensation of *self* is always in an inverse proportion.⁹⁰

And an appended footnote:

. . . Now as far as the profound sensibility, which is doubtless *one* of the components of genius, were alone considered, single and unbalanced, it might be fairly described as exposing the individual to

⁸⁹ *Table Talk*, May 21, 1830, p. 87.

⁹⁰ *Biographia Literaria*, edited by J. Shawcross (Oxford, 1907), I, 30-31. The last sentence has been quoted in full because it constitutes such a striking anticipation of Schopenhauer's view of genius as the highest form of will-less knowledge, and because it suggests the observation that De Quincey's characterization of genius as independent of the will carries an altogether different signification.

a greater chance of mental derangement; but then a more than usual rapidity of association, a more than usual power of passing from thought to thought, and image to image, is a component equally essential; and in the due modification of each by the other GENIUS itself consists . . .

Coleridge here stresses the intellectual element of genius more than does De Quincey, and gives a specific notion of how it interacts with sensibility.

Other elements of De Quincey's concept find their parallel in Coleridge, who expresses thus the idea of the passivity of genius:

. . . I have endeavored to discover what the qualities in a poem are, which may be deemed promises and specific symptoms of poetic power, as distinguished from general talent determined to poetic composition by accidental motives, by an act of the will, rather than by the inspiration of a genial and productive nature.⁹¹

He holds also that genius is an end and not a means: "For it is one contradistinction of genius from talent, that its predominant end is always comprized in the means; and this is one of the many points, which establish an analogy between genius and virtue."⁹² And, in the belief that "Genius may co-exist with wildness, idleness, folly, even with crime; but not long, believe me, with selfishness, and the indulgence of an envious disposition,"⁹³ he goes at least part of the way with De Quincey in suggesting not a mere analogy with virtue, but an alliance therewith. Finally there is a statement of Coleridge's which relates itself in a remarkable way, not to any one utterance of De Quincey's about genius as such, but to his view of the special kinds of truths which the literature of power communicates:

. . . To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances, which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar . . . this is the character and privilege of genius, and one of the marks which distinguish genius from talents. And therefore is it the prime merit of genius and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so to represent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a kindred feeling concerning them and that freshness of sensation

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 13.

⁹² *Ibid.*, I, 153.

⁹³ *Table Talk*, July 23, 1827, p. 64.

which is the constant accompaniment of mental, no less than of bodily, convalescence. Who has not a thousand times seen snow fall on water? Who has not watched it with a new feeling, from the time that he has read Burns' comparison of sensual pleasure

"To snow that falls upon a river
A moment white—then gone for ever!"

In poems, equally as in philosophic disquisitions, genius produces the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission.⁹⁴

Coleridge's conception of genius goes beyond De Quincey's not alone in giving a clearer account of the intellectual factor, but also in the recognition—the explicit recognition—that there is in genius an unconscious activity, "nay, that [the unconscious activity] is the genius in the man of genius."⁹⁵ But De Quincey's idea of passivity or spontaneity may be held to contain the notion implicitly.

We must conclude that De Quincey's definitions of genius represent little that is original except the striking concept that in genius the whole man is speaking, and that they stop short of adequacy, particularly in their failure to examine the relation to genius of the imagination. But his conception is one that harmonizes with his analysis of power, and probably he did assist in diffusing among English readers the idea of a vital distinction between genius and talent. The *New English Dictionary* quotes him in its account of the rise of this distinction.

B. THE IMAGINATION

It is a curious thing that in our survey of De Quincey's pronouncements on the literature of power and on genius we have not once run across the term "imagination." As a matter of fact, the word is not employed in any distinctive or definitive sense on more than half a dozen occasions in all

⁹⁴ *Biographia Literaria*, I, 59–60.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 258. But how strange is Coleridge's lapse into the opposite point of view when he says, in a letter to Lady Beaumont, that "the two sole component parts, even of *Genius*, are GOOD SENSE and METHOD." Quoted by Shawcross, *ibid.*, p. 268.

his writings. This is the more puzzling because, in examining his account of artistic imitation in Chapter III, we found that he recognizes "the check of difference" which distinguishes the representations of all true works of art from reality as something achieved by "the etherealizing [the idealizing] imagination."⁹⁶ In doing so he would seem to be conferring upon the faculty a function of the highest importance—to be, indeed, defining it as *the* artistic faculty.

We know, from a purely incidental statement in one of the "Letters to a Young Man," that he recognizes as a "great philosophic distinction" the difference between the imagination and the fancy, and that he attributes "the unveiling" of that distinction to Wordsworth.⁹⁷ He indicates this much in comments on the tendency of all languages to clear themselves of synonyms as intellectual culture advances and on the fact that before the appropriation of a superfluous word by a new shade or combination of meaning becomes fixed "an insensible *clinamen* . . . prepares the way for it."⁹⁸ It was thus with the words "fancy" and "imagination"; before Wordsworth fixed the "desynonymization" (the term is De Quincey's), "the two words had begun to diverge from each other; the first being used to express a faculty somewhat capricious and exempted from law, the latter to express a faculty more self-determined"⁹⁹—"which distinction comes out still more strongly in the secondary derivative *fanciful*, and the primary derivative *fantastic*."¹⁰⁰ De Quincey nowhere mentions Coleridge's contributions to the theory of the imagination.

De Quincey's only detailed comment on the imaginative power is contained in a small essay—one of the "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater"—called "False Distinctions."¹⁰¹ It is unfortunate that here he should use "the words Fancy, Imagination, Imaginative Power, as equivalent to each other." His reason for not discriminating between them is that "it was not necessary for the present purpose to take notice of them in any other relation than that of con-

⁹⁶ See *supra*, p. 96.

⁹⁷ X, 72.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, De Quincey's footnote on the word "capricious."

¹⁰¹ X, 439-445.

tradistinction to the formal understanding or *Logos*,"¹⁰² his purpose being to point out "what a world of delusion . . . lies in the hollow distinction of *Reason* [not the higher understanding specifically, we judge] and *Imagination*."¹⁰³ But as a matter of fact, he does observe the "insensible clinamen" of the words in certain important definitive statements.

Upon the "meagre and vague opposition" between reason and imagination (his idea of this we leave in abeyance for the moment) De Quincey tells us there are built many other errors as gross as this. He analyzes three—the mistaken beliefs that women have more imagination than men, that the savage has more imagination than the civilized man, and that the Oriental nations have more imagination than those of Europe. We are concerned with certain remarks he drops by the way.

. . . What work of imagination owing its birth to a woman can he [any man] lay his hand on . . . which has exerted any memorable influence, such as History would notice, upon the mind of Man? . . . As to poetry in its *highest* form, I never yet knew a woman—nor will believe that any has existed—who could rise to an entire sympathy with what is most excellent in that art. High abstractions, to which poetry κατ' ἐξοχην is always tending, are utterly inapprehensible by the female mind; the concrete and the individual, fleshed in action and circumstances, are all that they can reach: the Το καθ' ὄλον—the Ideal—is above them.¹⁰⁴

It is implicit in this passage that imagination is the abstracting or idealizing faculty, which purges the concrete and the individual of those elements which conceal their essences.

De Quincey would not merely deny the Oriental nations all imaginative power; he asserts that they

. . . betray the *negative* of that power (= — imagination). In the Koran I read that the pen with which God writes is made of mother-of-pearl, and is so long that an Arabian courser of the finest breed would not be able to gallop from one end to the other in a space of 500 years.

¹⁰² "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater: False Distinctions," X, 445.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 442. It is consistent with this position that De Quincey regards novels as "the chief natural resource of woman" (*Posthumous Works*, I, 199).

Upon this it would be said in the usual style of English criticism—"Yes; no doubt, it is very extravagant: the writer's imagination runs away with his judgment." Imagination! How so? The imagination seeks the illimitable; dissolves the definite; translates the finite into the infinite. But this Arabian image has, on the contrary, translated the infinite into the finite. And so it is generally with Oriental imagery.¹⁰⁵

One might expect De Quincey to grant at least the epithet "fanciful" to the Oriental imagery, but he does not. The center of our interest, however, is the assertion that the imagination (and there can be no doubt that he is here using the word in its discriminative sense) "seeks the illimitable; dissolves the definite; translates the finite into the infinite." This is De Quincey's closest approach to a formal definition. It amounts to little other than a triple paraphrase, in more definite terms, of the statement that the imagination abstracts and idealizes. The "illimitable" or the "infinite" is doubtless to be taken first in the sense of anything which is freed from the de-universalizing or accidental circumstances attendant upon particular or individual existence, and then in the extended sense of all being so freed.

Before considering the relationships of De Quincey's idea of the imagination as suggested by this most pregnant of his statements, we proceed to examine the ground of his objection to what he describes as the false opposition of "*Reason and Imagination*":

In all this [the belief that women, savages, and Oriental peoples have superior powers of imagination] there is . . . something worse than mere error of theory; for it is thus implied that the understanding and the imaginative faculty exist in insulation—neither borrowing nor lending; that they are strong at the expense of each other; &c. &c. And from these errors of theory arise practical errors of the worst consequence. One of the profoundest is that which concerns the discipline of the reasoning faculties. All men are anxious, if it were only for display in conversation, to "reason" (as they call it) well. But how mighty is the error which many make about the constituents of that power! That the fancy has anything to do with it is the last thought that would occur to them. Logic, say they, delivers the art of reasoning; and logic has surely no commerce with the fancy. Be it so: but logic,

¹⁰⁵ "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater: False Distinctions," X, 444.

though indispensable, concerns only the *formal* part of reasoning, and is therefore only its *negative* condition . . . the *matter* of your reasoning is the grand point; and this can no more be derived from logic than a golden globe from the geometry of the sphere. It is through the fancy, and by means of the *schemata* which that faculty furnishes to the understanding, that reasoning (good or bad) proceeds, as to its positive or *material* part, on most of the topics which interest mankind: the *vis imaginatrix* of the mind is the true *fundus* from which the understanding draws; and it may be justly said in an axiomatic form that "tantum habet homo discursus quantum habet phantasiae."¹⁰⁶

Fancy, De Quincey says—interchanging the word, it will be remembered, indiscriminately with "imagination"—contributes the matter or positive part of reasoning in that it furnishes *schemata*. This same conception is developed, and the *schemata* are seen to be physical analogies, in a passage in the "Rhetoric" on Burke's employment of fancy.

In the discussion of Burke De Quincey is apostrophizing the "immortal donkeys" who with "an obstinate stupidity" have "brayed away for one third of a century" about that which they are pleased to call Burke's "fancy":¹⁰⁷

. . . Fancy in your throats, ye miserable twaddlers! As if Edmund Burke were the man to play with his fancy for the purpose of separable ornament!¹⁰⁸ He was a man of fancy in no other sense than as Lord Bacon was so, and Jeremy Taylor, and as all large and discursive thinkers are and must be: that is to say, the fancy which he had in common with all mankind . . . in him was urged into unusual activity under the necessities of his capacious understanding. His great and peculiar distinction was that he viewed all objects of the understanding under more relations than other men, and under more complex relations . . . Now, to apprehend and detect more relations, or to pursue them steadily, is a process absolutely impossible without the intervention of physical analogies. To say, therefore, that a man is a great thinker, or a fine thinker, is but another expression for saying that he has a *schematizing* (or, to use a plainer but less accurate expression, a figurative) understanding. In that sense, and for that purpose, Burke is figurative: but, understood, as he *has* been understood by the

¹⁰⁶ "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-Eater: False Distinctions," X, 444-445.

¹⁰⁷ "Rhetoric," X, 114-115.

¹⁰⁸ Somewhat inconsistently De Quincey proceeds to admit in the next paragraph that "in some rare cases Burke *did* indulge himself in a pure rhetorician's use of fancy; consciously and profusely lavishing his ornaments for mere purposes of effect" (*ibid.*, p. 115).

long-eared race of his critics, not as thinking in and by his figures, but as deliberately laying them on by way of enamel or after-ornament,—not as *incarnating*, but simply as *dressing* his thoughts in imagery,—so understood, he is not the Burke of reality, but a poor fictitious Burke¹⁰⁹

Such is the relation of imaginative power to the discursive understanding; we shall not do violence to De Quincey's conception if we call imagination the active or creative power of thought. This is in harmony with Coleridge's phrase descriptive of the fancy (the sense of which Wordsworth extended to the imagination as well)—“the aggregative and associative power.”

But what we should like to have an understanding of is De Quincey's conception of the relation of the imagination to the higher understanding, and to the feelings which are the basis of its intuitions; he leaves us, however, to guess at any solution to this problem he may have had in mind. And, guessing, one may venture—though the identification is not authorized by any explicit statement in his writings—that the imagination is not only the active and positive power in discursive thought, but also the intellectual agency in intuitions that are born of feeling, and that it is the active, intellectual, component of genius. No other relationship at once finds a place for the imagination in the activity of the higher understanding or the understanding heart; without such a relationship the sense in which feeling is more than mere feeling, in which it is revelation, remains unreal. And the statement that the imagination seeks the illimitable, dissolves the definite, and translates the finite into the infinite harmonizes perfectly with such an explanation. Mere feeling, however profound, is not illimitable until made so by the abstracting and idealizing power of the intellect.

Such a definition of the relation of imagination to feeling appears to bring the elements of De Quincey's thought into harmony and synthesis, though it must be remembered that this is not his own expressed conception, but only a reconstruction, either of what he may have thought to be the true

relation (it is possible that he regarded the relation as too obvious to require definition) or of what it would have been logical for him to think. In any event, it is obvious that, except perhaps for his exposition of the relation of imaginative power to the discursive understanding, he contributed nothing whatsoever to the theory of the imagination. He took over, it appears, the central conception of Wordsworth and Coleridge, but did nothing with it, not even so much as indicate just how much of their theory—of Coleridge's in particular—he accepted.

Certainly De Quincey's idea that the imagination seeks the illimitable and dissolves the definite recalls such a phrase as Wordsworth's "the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination."¹¹⁰ With even greater distinctness it seems to echo Coleridge's more comprehensive statement that the (secondary) imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify."¹¹¹ It is obvious, however, that De Quincey's single sentence is too slight evidence to permit a comparative analysis of his conception with Coleridge's. There are metaphysical undertones to Coleridge's remark—a metaphysical background to all his discussion of the imagination—almost certainly not present in De Quincey's. It is pertinent to recall De Quincey's distrust of romantic metaphysics as a serious system of ideas, his reference to Coleridge as one who could spin gorgeous theories at will. If he had followed Coleridge in serious acceptance of a comprehensive metaphysical theory of the imagination it is almost certain that his critical essays would be replete with allusions to that theory instead of almost bare of reference to the faculty. Everything points to the conclusion that his conception of the imagination was taken over from Wordsworth, and from Coleridge as well, of course, in so far as the two worked out their view together. And because he apparently did nothing more than adopt their general conception, it seems pointless—as, in view of the inadequacy of data on the detail of his ideas, it would

¹¹⁰ *Prose Works*, II, 138.

¹¹¹ *Biographia Literaria*, I, 202.

appear very difficult—to attempt a comparison of his conception of the imagination with eighteenth-century theories.

It may be that De Quincey failed to ponder the subject of the imagination because he found Wordsworth's conception entirely adequate, and Coleridge's further speculations misty and inconclusive. Furthermore, his principal concern was with the *effect* of power, rather than with the process. He was, to be sure, a creative genius in his own right, and it might be supposed that this fact would lead him to give more attention to the instrument and process of creation. But it is possible that the fact that much of the imaginative forming of his own works of power was carried on in dreams lulled philosophic curiosity in that he took dreaming, in all its mysteriousness, for granted. At any rate, it is the passive element of the feelings that was most interesting to him; and it is significant that it is dreaming (a passive activity), and not imagination, that he defines as "the one great tube through which man communicates with the shadowy," putting it with the heart, the eye, the ear, as "the apparatus which forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain."¹¹²

IV. MODES AND LEVELS OF POWER

De Quincey tends to accept what is ordinarily considered the classical or neoclassical doctrine of sharply differentiated species and genres in literature. This fact shows itself of course in his very attempt to separate literature from non-literature and the literature of knowledge from the literature of power. It shows in his insistence that "Every species of composition is to be tried by its own laws";¹¹³ that "Every mode of intellectual communication has its separate strength and separate weakness,—its peculiar embarrassments, compensated by peculiar resources";¹¹⁴ and in his approving mention of Schlegel's comment on Lessing, "that merely to clear up the boundaries of the different species, which might seem a negative service, yields the greatest positive uses for the development of each species in its whole individualities."¹¹⁵

¹¹² "Suspiria de Profundis," XIII, 335.

¹¹³ "Rhetoric," X, 101.

¹¹⁴ "Style," X, 139.

¹¹⁵ "Lessing," XI, 163.

And it shows also in his divisions of literature into classes other than the recognized types and forms. There are two groups of such divisions which particularly merit attention: (1) the division of literature into the literature of the elementary affections and the literature of manners and (2) the division of literature into its pagan and Christian modes, which he holds to be parallel respectively to the classical and the romantic.

The fullest exposition of the first set of divisions is found in "The Poetry of Pope," following almost immediately upon the definition of the distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power:

... In *every* nation first comes the higher form of passion, next the lower. This is the mere order of nature in governing the movements of human intellect as connected with social evolution—this is, therefore, the universal order—that in the earliest stages of literature men deal with the great elementary grandeurs of passion, of conscience, of the will in self-conflict; they deal with the capital struggle of the human race in raising empires or in overthrowing them, in vindicating their religion (as by crusades), or with the more mysterious struggles amongst spiritual races allied to our own that have been dimly revealed to us. We then have an *Iliad*, a *Jerusalem Delivered*, a *Paradise Lost*. These great subjects exhausted, or exhausted in their more inviting manifestations, inevitably by the mere endless motion of society, there succeeds a lower key of passion. Expanding social intercourse in towns, multiplied and crowded more and more, banishes those gloomier and grander phases of human history from literature. The understanding is quickened; the lower faculties of the mind,—fancy, and the habit of minute distinction,—are applied to the contemplation of society and manners. Passion begins to wheel in lower flights, and to combine itself with interests that in part are addressed to the insulated understanding—observing, refining, reflecting. This may be called the *minor* key of literature, in opposition to the *major* as cultivated by Shakspeare, Spenser, Milton. But this key arises spontaneously in *every* people, and by a necessity as sure as any that moulds the progress of civilisation. Milton and Spenser were *not* of any Italian school. Their Italian studies were the result and not the cause of the determination given to their minds by nature working in conjunction with their social period. It is equally childish to say of Dryden and Pope that they belonged to any French school. That thing which they did they *would* have done though France had been at the back of China. The school to which they belonged was a school developed at a certain stage of progress in all nations alike by the human heart as modified by the

human understanding: it is a school depending on the peculiar direction given to the sensibilities by the reflecting faculty and by the new phases of society . . . after the primary formations of the fermenting intellect come everywhere,—in Thebes or Athens, France or England,—the secondary; . . . after the creating passion comes the reflecting; and recombining passion; . . . after the solemnities and cloistral grandeurs of life, solitary and self-conflicting, comes the recoil of a self-observing and self-dissecting stage, derived from life social and gregarious.¹¹⁶

This passage, and several more in which De Quincey sets forth the same ideas,¹¹⁷ are less widely known than certain other of his *loci critici*, notably those concerned with the antithesis of knowledge and power, but they are surely among the most important of all, and deal far more clearly with their subject. There is nothing here which requires explication; one can proceed at once to an analysis of significance.

It is obvious that the passage does far more than set forth a proposed classification of fundamental types of literature: it relates these types to the idea of a developing society. This involves a profound grasp of what may be called the organic conception of literature, a conception which may be described as the principal flower of German romantic criticism as it stemmed from Herder. By De Quincey's time this conception was sufficiently diffused in English thought to leave its mark on the criticism of the romantics generally,¹¹⁸ yet it was imperfectly assimilated by most of them.¹¹⁹ It is De Quincey's distinction to have enunciated more forcibly and consistently than any of his contemporaries the general principle of the organic relation between the literature of any nation and period and the culture and society of which it is an expression. This organic view prevents his fondness for classification based on the idea of the reality of clearly

¹¹⁶ XI, 60–62.

¹¹⁷ See the passage in the essay on Pope, IV, 278 (the subject is one which naturally arises whenever De Quincey discourses on Pope, for the reason that Pope is for him a perfect example of a writer in what he calls the minor key); see also "Recollections of Charles Lamb," III, 88–89, and "Style," X, 202.

¹¹⁸ Its influence is particularly apparent on Shelley, in his *Defense of Poetry*.

¹¹⁹ Lamb's thought in his essay "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century" shows no trace of it.

defined types and species from resulting in the assumption of absolutes. Indeed, through the influence of the organic point of view, De Quincey's predilection for definite classification, which we have referred to as uncharacteristic of the romantic mind in its tendency to abolish clear outlines, became a party to a union that was thoroughly romantic.

It is notable that De Quincey goes further than to regard any literature as the peculiar expression of a national mind: he relates the literature of a period to the contemporary stage of social development. And in insisting upon the parallelism of the stages in the development of one national culture to those in all others he might be said to repudiate, to some extent, the merely nationalistic principle. To be sure, he assumes what seems to us a much too simple scheme of evolution: from an age in which a given national society is formative to one in which life becomes settled and social intercourse refined. He pictures the development within one national society as consisting of one such cycle only. One wonders how he would have contrived to explain, on such a basis, the literature of his own day, which he would be the first to assert was in what he calls the major key. His error, it is plain to us, consists in identifying the cycle of development with the idea of a purely nationalistic culture. But his general conception is well advanced for his day, is modern and scientific.

It is entirely natural that De Quincey should evaluate as he does the two types of literature corresponding to the two distinct stages in national cultural development, that he should denominate the one the major key of literature and the other the minor key. He is in general careful not to confuse excellence (or its antithesis) within one kind or key with the excellence (or inferiority) of that kind itself. Thus, marked as was his personal prejudice against Pope in many ways, he grants him the highest praise consistent with his evaluation of the type of poetry which Pope was in a position to produce, calling him "the most brilliant of all wits who have at any period applied themselves to the poetic treatment of human manners, to the selecting from the play of human

character what is picturesque, or the arresting what is fugitive."¹²⁰ But it seemed to him without question that the literature of the elementary affections was a higher and more valuable literature than the literature of manners; this is a logical consequent of his entire conception of the nature and value of power:

. . . In the literature of every nation, we are naturally disposed to place in the highest rank those who have produced some great and colossal work—a "Paradise Lost," a "Hamlet," a "Novum Organum,"—which presupposes an effort of intellect, a comprehensive grasp, and a sustaining power, for its original conception, corresponding in grandeur to that effort, different in kind, which must preside in its execution. But, after this highest class, in which the power to conceive and the power to execute are upon the same scale of grandeur, there comes a second, in which brilliant powers of execution, applied to conceptions of a very inferior range, are allowed to establish a classical rank. Every literature possesses, besides its great national gallery, a cabinet of minor pieces, not less perfect in their polish, possibly more so. In reality, the characteristic of this class is elaborate perfection—the point of inferiority is not in the finishing, but in the compass and power of the original creation, which (however exquisite in its class) moves within a smaller sphere. To this class belong, for example, "The Rape of the Lock," that finished jewel of English literature; "The Dunciad" (a still more exquisite gem); "The Vicar of Wakefield" . . .¹²¹

In this passage the emphasis has shifted from the nature of the subject matter as determined by the age to quality and range of subject matter and to perfection of execution.¹²² This lends all the more interest to the distinction between the major and the minor keys of literature, as indicating a correlation with the distinction between literature which is primarily that of power and literature which is primarily one of pleasure, and thus bearing upon what we have maintained to be the paradox in De Quincey's theory of literature.

The literature of manners, which is also that of execution (and of intellectual pleasure), is not alone less important in

¹²⁰ "Alexander Pope," IV, 237.

¹²¹ "Recollections of Charles Lamb," III, 88-89.

¹²² It is significant that this passage is incidental to an evaluation of the work of Lamb, which De Quincey places in the cabinet of perfectly executed minor pieces.

De Quincey's view than the literature of the elementary affections, but it is also more restricted in its appeal:

... It is no insult, but, on the contrary, it is often a secret compliment to the simplicity and the *breadth* of a man's intellectual nature, that he cannot enter into the artificial, the tortuous, the conventional. Many a rude mind has comprehended to the full both Milton in his elementary grandeur and Shakspeare in his impassioned depths, that could not have even dimly guessed at the meaning of a situation in comedy where the comic rested upon arbitrary rules and conventional proprieties.¹²³

... Yet, after all—as one proof how much more commanding is that part of a literature which speaks to the elementary affections of men than that which is founded on the mutable aspects of manners—it is a fact that, even in our elaborate system of society, where an undue value is unavoidably given to the whole science of social intercourse, and a continual irritation applied to the sensibilities which point in that direction, still, under all these advantages, Pope himself is less read, less quoted, less thought of, than the elder and graver section of our literature. It is a great calamity for an author such as Pope, that, generally speaking, it requires so much experience of life to enjoy his peculiar felicities as must argue an age likely to have impaired the general capacity for enjoyment.¹²⁴

De Quincey's love of careful distinction leads him to the recognition of other divisions in literature—literature proper, that is—than those of the major and minor keys. In addition to the modes of the pagan and the Christian, to be discussed presently, there are the epic and the dramatic modes. These signify something more than the actual types of composition after which they are named. They represent different kinds of power:

... those who have reflected at all upon the fine arts know that power of one kind is often inconsistent, positively incompatible, with power of another kind. For example, the *dramatic* mind is incompatible with the *epic*. And, though we should consent to suppose that some intellect might arise endowed upon a scale of such angelic comprehensiveness as to vibrate equally and indifferently towards either pole, still it is next to impossible, in the exercise and culture of the

¹²³ "Lord Carlisle on Pope," XI, 111.

¹²⁴ "Autobiography," II, 58. From this passage one might indeed presume that De Quincey regards his own age as of a sort to produce the minor strain of literature.

two powers, but some bias must arise which would give that advantage to the one over the other which the right arm has over the left.¹²⁵

The epic and the dramatic modes of power are illustrated most clearly, for De Quincey, in Milton and Shakespeare. The Miltonic mind is characterized by "grand and continuous motions,"¹²⁶ by "majestic regularity and planetary solemnity";¹²⁷ the dramatic or Shakespearian mind, by lightning-like or meteoric motions.¹²⁸ Addison, De Quincey tells us, could in some measure understand and appreciate the epic power in Milton, but "as to the meteoric and incalculable eccentricities of the *dramatic* mind, as it displayed itself in the heroic age of our Drama amongst the Titans of 1590-1630, they confounded and overwhelmed him."¹²⁹ Lamb, on the other hand, was dramatic, not epic, in his intellect and taste; he had no genial appreciation of Milton, but he did comprehend Shakespeare.¹³⁰ Though Wordsworth could appreciate Milton, his natural affinities were with Shakespeare:

... In a philosophic poem, like the "Excursion," he is naturally led to speak more pointedly of Milton; but his own affinities are every way more numerous and striking to Shakspeare. For this reason I have myself been led to group him with Shakspeare. In those two poets alike is seen the infinite of Painting; in Aeschylus and Milton alike are seen the simplicities and stern sublimities of Sculpture.¹³¹

The placing of Aeschylus with Milton as an example of power of the epic type and the linking of Wordsworth with Shakespeare clearly indicate the freedom of each of the types from any necessary connection with either epic or dramatic form.

Yet another distinction De Quincey makes is that between subjective and objective poetry. Subjective poetry, he states, had no existence in Homer's day:

... Not only the powers for introverting the eye upon the *spectator*, as himself the *spectaculum*, were then undeveloped and inconceivable, but the sympathies did not exist to which such an appeal could have addressed itself. Besides, and partly from the same cause, even as

¹²⁵ "Goethe," IV, 396.

¹²⁶ "Richter," XI, 266.

¹²⁷ "Shakspeare," IV, 23.

¹²⁸ "Charles Lamb," V, 236.

¹²⁹ "Shakspeare," IV, 23.

¹³⁰ "Charles Lamb," V, 236.

¹³¹ *Posthumous Works*, II, 200.

objects, the human feelings and affections were too grossly and imperfectly distinguished; had not reached even the infancy of that stage in which the passions begin their processes of intermodification; nor *could* have reached it, from the simplicity of social life, as well as from the barbarism of the Greek religion.¹³²

But the objective kind of poetry is not confined to Homeric days. "The metrical romances of the Middle Ages have the same shivering character of starvation as to the inner life of man." And De Quincey criticizes Southey's poems as being too objective—in an age, the implication is, when subjectivity is at once possible and desirable:

. . . they are too intensely *objective*—too much reflect the mind, as spreading itself out upon external things—too little exhibit the mind as introverting itself upon its own thoughts and feelings. This, however, is an objection which only seems to limit the range of the poetry—and all poetry *is* limited in its range: none comprehends more than a section of the human power.¹³³

One could wish that De Quincey had pursued the conception of objective versus subjective poetry further and had brought it into relation with his other classification of the literature of the elementary affections versus the literature of manners. Even though he did not, the idea is suggested by a comparison of the two classifications that the too great simplicity of the latter one could be remedied by a judicious synthesis of the two. Literature in an early stage, we might say, deals with the primary affections in an objective manner. Later, literature comes to deal with subjects less grand—with the life of manners—but it does so, as De Quincey himself points out, in a "self-observing and self-dissecting" way. Finally, when the forces that act upon society are such as to stir men's feelings deeply once again (and this is likely to happen whenever the life of the social organism is changing rapidly), a literature of the more impassioned kind is again produced, and is this time subjective, the self-dissecting technique of the preceding period having entered into a synthesis with the new interests in subject matter.

¹³² "Notes on Gilfillan's *Literary Portraits: Keats*," XI, 386-387.

¹³³ "Literary Reminiscences," II, 319.

We turn now to a consideration of De Quincey's view of pagan and Christian literature as constituting two completely distinct modes of power. His most effective statement of the view is in Number III of the "Letters to a Young Man," where he is discussing the value of learning the Greek language. The pertinent passage itself begins with one of the sweeping declarations, highly stimulating to thought, which he is given to making, a declaration that "We have hitherto seen no rational criticism on Greek literature; nor, indeed, to say the truth, much criticism which teaches anything, or solves anything, upon any literature." He will simply suggest one consideration as to the importance of knowing Greek literature—in the original if possible:

. . . Now, it is my private theory, to which you will allow what degree of weight you please, that the antique or pagan literature is a polar antagonist to the modern or Christian literature; that each is an evolution from a distinct principle, having nothing in common but what is necessarily common to all modes of thought,—namely, good sense and logic; and that they are to be criticised from different stations and points of view. This same thought has occurred to others; but no great advance is made simply by propounding the general thesis; and as yet nobody has done more. It is only by the development of this thesis that any real service can be performed The difference of the antique from the Christian literature . . . is not like that between English and Spanish literature—species and species—but as between genus and genus. The advantages [of reading Greek literature], therefore, are—1, the *power* which it offers generally as a literature, 2, the new phases under which it presents the human mind, the antique being the other hemisphere, as it were, which, with our own or Christian hemisphere, composes the entire sphere of human intellectual energy.¹³⁴

To the assertion that no one has as yet done more than propound the general thesis that the two literatures represent an evolution from distinct principles and must be criticized from different points of view, De Quincey appends this footnote:

. . . Nor do I much expect, *will* do more: which opinion I build on the particular formula chosen for expressing the opposition of the antique and the Christian literature,—namely, the classical and the romantic. This seeming to me to imply a total misconception of the true

principle on which the distinction rests, I naturally look for no further developments of the thesis from that quarter.¹³⁵

De Quincey had little sympathy with the use of the terms "classical" and "romantic" as descriptive of the two modes of literature, apparently for the reason that neither word seemed suggestive of the real differentiating principle.¹³⁶ But the problem of the relative pretensions of ancient and modern literature he conceives to be the most interesting of all literary questions and, because it includes most others and some special to itself, the most comprehensive.¹³⁷

What is for De Quincey the essential differentiating principle is suggested by the terminology he chooses, and has already been dealt with to some extent in our analysis of his conception of the moral infinite in Chapter II, as well as in our discussion of the modes of the sublime. His most revealing pronouncement on the matter is in the chapter on Oxford in the "Autobiography," where he is speaking specifically of the essential difference between the Greek and the English modes of tragedy. He has been disparaging the sublimity of Greek poetry, and eulogizing the sublimities of Milton.

Still [he concedes], in the Greek tragedy, however otherwise embittered against ancient literature by the dismal affectations current in the scenical poetry, at least I felt the presence of a great and original power. It might be a power inferior, upon the whole, to that which presides in the English tragedy; I believed that it was; but it was equally genuine, and appealed equally to real and deep sensibilities in our nature. Yet, also, I felt that the two powers at work in the two

¹³⁵ De Quincey's prejudice against the German critics leads him to do less than justice to their analysis of the distinction between the romantic and the classic. Moreover, he fails entirely to give them credit for the idea that the difference between ancient and modern art was due to the influence of Christianity upon the latter. This idea is present in the thought of Frederick Schlegel, and A. W. Schlegel develops it in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*.

¹³⁶ De Quincey's most direct approach to a definition of the romantic is his statement that "He that is romantic errs usually by too much elevation. He violates the standard of reasonable expectation by drawing too violently upon the nobilities of human nature" ("Postscript" to "On War," VIII, 393). This conception is not, as a matter of fact, too far removed from what he does consider to be the differentiating principle of modern or Christian literature.

¹³⁷ "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 289.

forms of the drama were essentially different; and, without having read a line of German at that time, or knowing of any such controversy, I began to meditate on the elementary grounds of difference between the Pagan and the Christian forms of poetry. The dispute has since been carried on extensively in France, not less than in Germany, as between the *classical* and the *romantic*. But I will venture to assert that not one step in advance has been made, up to this day. The shape into which I threw the question it may be well to state; because I am persuaded that out of that one idea, properly pursued, might be evolved the whole separate characteristics of the Christian and the Antique. Why is it, I asked, that the Christian idea of *sin* is an idea utterly unknown to the Pagan mind? . . . the idea of holiness, and the anti-thetic idea of sin, as a violation of this awful and unimaginable sanctity, was so utterly undeveloped in the Pagan mind, that no word exists in classical Greek or classical Latin which approaches either pole of this synthesis Again (but this was some years after), I found Schiller and Goethe applauding the better taste of the ancients, in symbolizing the idea of death by a beautiful youth, with a torch inverted, &c., as compared with the Christian types of a skeleton and hour-glasses, &c. And much surprised I was to hear Mr. Coleridge approving of this German sentiment. Yet, here again, I felt, the peculiar genius of Christianity was covertly at work moving upon a different road, and under opposite ideas, to a just result, in which the harsh and austere expression yet pointed to a dark reality, whilst the beautiful Greek adumbration was, in fact, a veil and a disguise. The corruptions and the other "dishonours" of the grave, and whatsoever composes the sting of death in the Christian view, is traced up to sin as its ultimate cause. Hence, besides the expression of Christian humility, in thus nakedly exhibiting the wrecks and ruins made by sin, there is also a latent profession indicated of Christian hope. For the Christian contemplates steadfastly, though with trembling awe, the lowest point of his descent; since, for him, that point, the last of his fall, is also the first of his re-ascent, and serves, besides, as an exponent of its infinity; the infinite depth becoming, in the rebound, a measure of the infinite re-ascent. Whereas, on the contrary, with the gloomy uncertainties of a Pagan on the question of his final restoration, and also . . . with his utter perplexity as to the nature of his restoration, if any were by accident in reserve . . . , it was the natural resource to consult the general feeling of anxiety and distrust, by throwing a thick curtain and a veil of beauty over the whole too painful subject. To place the horrors in high relief could here have answered no purpose but that of wanton cruelty; whereas, with the Christian hopes, the very saddest memorials of the havocks made by death are antagonist prefigurations of great victories in the rear.

These speculations, at that time, I pursued earnestly; and I then

believed myself, as I yet do, to have ascertained the two great and opposite laws under which the Grecian and the English tragedy has each separately developed itself. Whether wrong or right in that belief, sure I am that those in Germany who have treated the case of Classical and Romantic are not entitled to credit for any discovery at all. The Schlegels . . . pointed to the distinction; barely indicated it; and that was already some service done, because a presumption arose that the antique and the modern literatures, having clearly some essential differences, might, perhaps, rest on foundations originally distinct, and obey different laws. And hence it occurred that many disputes, as about the unities, &c., might originate in a confusion of these laws. This checks the presumption of the shallow criticism, and points to deeper investigations. Beyond this, neither the German nor the French disputers on the subject have talked to any profitable purpose.¹³⁸

This passage has been quoted in full for the reason that it contains De Quincey's only detailed application to a specific case of his general principle of differentiation between the ancient and the modern. In adopting an awareness of the antithetical ideas of holiness and sin, ideas for which the rise of the Christian religion was responsible, as the key to the differentiation of modes, De Quincey is of course departing from a purely natural theory of causation, for he would explain the appearance and development of Christianity in extrahistorical terms; yet, granting the supernatural interpolation of a new and powerful cause, his theory of the difference between pagan and Christian literature remains a highly interesting application of the organic principle, and perhaps the most original aspect of his theory of literature.

It is regrettable that De Quincey did not present us with a systematic discussion of the application of his thesis to the literature of tragedy. He gives only scattered hints as to the specific terms of such an application, and it is easy to become confused in an attempt to make an analysis of the ideas he must have had in mind, all the more so because of the inconsistencies in his evaluation of the Greek mode. These inconsistencies in themselves are explicable in terms of the fluctuations in the pressure of his Christian prejudice, but they introduce an element of confusion into an already difficult subject.

We must never forget [he remarks in one context] that it [pagan literature] is not *impar* merely, but also *dispar*. And such is its value in this light, that I protest five hundred kings' ransoms . . . would not be too much for the infinite treasure of the Greek tragic drama alone. Is it superior to our own? No, nor (so far as capable of collation) not by many degrees approaching to it. And were the case, therefore, one merely of degrees, there would be no room for the pleasure I express. But it shows us the ultimatum of the human mind mutilated and castrated of its infinities, and (what is worse) of its moral infinities.¹³⁹

The prejudice evident here serves, of course, to throw into the greater relief De Quincey's essential principle of differentiation between Greek and modern tragedy. The true infinities—the full grasp of the fundamental human situation—are absent for the Greeks. But the point of view here expressed would seem to be negated in part by such a passage as the following:

. . . [Athens] only through all the world had a theatre, and in the service of this theatre she retained the mightiest by far of her creative intellects. Teach she could not in those fields where no man was unlearned; light was impossible where there could be no darkness; and to guide was a hopeless pretension when all aberrations must be wilful.¹⁴⁰

De Quincey's meaning here (as is shown by the context) is that pagan morality was so simple and well understood by all that no instruction in it was called for—" . . . [But] if not light, yet life; if not absolute birth, yet moral regeneration, and fructifying warmth: these were quickening forces which abundantly she was able to engraft upon truths else slumbering and inert."¹⁴¹ This would seem to conform precisely to De Quincey's conception of the power communicated by literature in any age:

. . . Not affecting to teach the new, she could yet vivify the old. Those moral echoes, so solemn and pathetic, that lingered in the ear from her stately tragedies, all spoke with the authority of voices from the grave. The great phantoms that crossed her stage all pointed with shadowy fingers to shattered dynasties and the ruins of once-regal houses, Pelopidae or Labdacidae, as monuments of sufferings in expia-

¹³⁹ *Posthumous Works*, I, 279.

¹⁴⁰ "The Chinese Question in 1857," XIV, 348.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

tion of violated morals, or sometimes—which even more thrillingly spoke to human sensibilities—of guilt too awful to be expiated.¹⁴²

This clearly contradicts the idea that Greek tragedy was in no way conversant with the moral infinities, and thus lessens the measure of its differentiation from Christian literature, even though De Quincey continues with the question,

. . . And, in the midst of these appalling records, what is their ultimate solution? From what keynote does Athenian Tragedy trace the expansion of its own dark impassioned music? *ἄβρις* (*hybris*)—the spirit of outrage and arrogant self-assertion—in that temper lurks the original impulse towards wrong; and to that temper the Greek Drama adapts its monitory legends. The doctrine of the Hebrew Scriptures as to vicarious retribution is at times discovered secretly moving through the scenic poetry of Athens.¹⁴³

For De Quincey the principle of *hybris* is no doubt constitutive of a far lower form of moral vision than that of the Christian conscience; even so, it appears that he does recognize, in his moments of more sympathetic insight, the presence in the Greek mind of a sense of immitigable guilt, closely allied to the idea of sin.

But perhaps the element of inconsistency here does not essentially affect the underlying basis of De Quincey's interpretation of the difference between classical and modern tragedy. For while a dim groping toward the concept of the illimitableness of sin may be discernible among the Greeks, there is no complementary conception of the infinite of holiness, and no scheme of redemption from guilt. And the result is that

That kind of feeling which broods over the Grecian Tragedy . . . was more nearly allied to the atmosphere of death than that of life. This expresses rudely the character of awe and religious horror investing the Greek theatre . . . Into an English tragedy even festivals of joy may enter . . . which, or anything *like* which, is incompatible with the very being of the Greek. In that Tragedy what uniformity of gloom; in the English what light alternating with depths of darkness!¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² "The Chinese Question in 1857," XIV, 348.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 348-349.

¹⁴⁴ "The *Antigone* of Sophocles," X, 374-375.

... In the Greek drama, he [the reader] must conceive the presiding power to be *Death*; in the English, *Life*.¹⁴⁶

De Quincey regards ancient tragedy as exhibiting "the cold moony reflexes of life" as contrasted with "the true sunny life of Shakspeare."¹⁴⁶

... Shakspeare—that is, English Tragedy—postulates the intense life of flesh and blood, of animal sensibility, of man and woman—breathing, waking, stirring, palpitating with the pulses of hope and fear. In Greek Tragedy, the very masks show the utter impossibility of these tempests or conflicts. Struggle there is none, internal or external¹⁴⁷

And the result for form or style is that English tragedy is picturesque (probably not in the technical sense defined in Chapter III), comparable to the art of painting, whereas the Greek is sculptural.¹⁴⁸

It may appear that De Quincey's identification of the Greek mode of feeling with the spirit of death, and the modern mode with the spirit of life, represents a reversal of the situation as he analyzed it in terms of the pagan and Christian symbols of death—the youth with inverted torch and the skeleton. But this reversal is only on the surface. De Quincey would doubtless say that the image of the youth represents an attempt to escape from what was for the Greeks the fundamental melancholy reality, whereas the ultimate effect of the skeleton is an affirmation of the only real life. He may have misread the Greek attitude, but if so his error can be explained as a projection into Greek sensibility of the Christian attitude toward death unrelieved by faith in immortality.

The ultimate point of De Quincey's theory of the difference between the pagan and the Christian modes of power lies in its professed capacity to explain not only the presiding

¹⁴⁶ "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 315.

¹⁴⁶ "Shakspeare," IV, 71.

¹⁴⁷ "Theory of Greek Tragedy," X, 348.

¹⁴⁸ "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature," X, 315. These analogies appear to link the English and the Greek modes respectively* with the dramatic and the epic modes, both of which De Quincey recognizes as present in modern literature. But the epic or Miltonic mode is classical in form, though not in spirit.

spirit of each literature but also the forms in which that spirit is incarnated. The mixture, for example, of the solemn and the joyful, the tragic and the comic, in Shakespearian tragedy—a mixture so abhorrent to classical standards—becomes explicable as an effect of the more adequate realization in modern or Christian literature of the true “infinity of the world within me,” an apprehension of which does not arise (to quote De Quincey’s account of the “rapture of life” as expressed in music) “unless by the confluence of the mighty and terrific discords with the subtile concords,” by the union of vast antagonist forces. De Quincey’s admirable essay on the “Theory of Greek Tragedy,” though it does not constitute a systematic derivation of the forms of that tragedy, as contrasted with those of English tragedy, from the basic principle of difference we have presented, is yet a comprehensive attempt at definition of the differences of form. It does contain a partial correlation of the forms with the basic principle, and the elements of correlation that are lacking can in some measure be supplied by the reader.

It is interesting to note that De Quincey’s view of the essential difference of the pagan mode of power from the Christian does not extend to the field of comedy. The comedy of Greece, he avers, “depends essentially upon the same principles as our own”:

. . . Comedy, as the reflex of social life, will shift in correspondence to the shifting movements of civilisation. Inevitably, as human intercourse in cities grows more refined, Comedy will grow more subtle; it will build itself on distinctions of character less grossly defined, and on features of manners more delicate and impalpable. But the *fundus*, the ultimate resource, the well-head, of the comic, must for ever be sought in one and the same field,—viz. the ludicrous of incident, or the ludicrous of situation, or the ludicrous which arises in a mixed way between the character and the situation.¹⁴⁹

It is interesting also to observe that De Quincey regards the French tragic theatre as an unnatural imitation of the Greek, which “under a poor outside mimicry of the antique, conceal[s] the deadliest hostility to its vital purposes The English and the Grecian theatre differ as species and

¹⁴⁹ “Theory of Greek Tragedy,” X, 342.

species in nature; the French and the Grecian as a true and a monstrous birth in the same species."¹⁵⁰ Why Milton's imitations of classical forms are not to be regarded as abnormal and monstrous is nowhere explained.

We shall end our survey of the various modes and levels of power specifically recognized by De Quincey with a consideration of the few statements he has left us concerning the difference between poetry and prose.

Near the end of the "Rhetoric," when De Quincey leaves off discoursing on the idea of rhetoric itself and finally proceeds to comment briefly on Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*, which he is supposedly reviewing, he states this criticism:

In the course of his dissertation on style, Dr. Whately very needlessly enters upon the thorny question of the *quiddity*, or characteristic difference of poetry as distinguished from prose. We could much have wished that he had forborne to meddle with a *quaestio vexata* of this nature, both because in so incidental and cursory a discussion it could not receive a proper investigation, and because Dr. Whately is apparently not familiar with much of what has been written on that subject. On a matter so slightly discussed we shall not trouble ourselves to enter farther than to express our astonishment that a logician like Dr. Whately should have allowed himself to deliver so nugatory an argument as this which follows:—"Any composition in *verse* (and none that is not) is always called, whether good or bad, a poem, by all who have no favourite hypothesis to maintain." And the inference manifestly is that it is rightly so called. Now, if a man has taken up any fixed opinion on the subject, no matter whether wrong or right, and has reasons to give for his opinion, this man comes under the description of those who have a favourite hypothesis to maintain. It follows, therefore, that the only class of people whom Dr. Whately will allow as unbiassed judges on this question—a question not of fact, but of opinion—are those who have, and who profess to have, no opinion at all upon the subject, or, having one, have no reasons for it. But, apart from this contradiction, how is it possible that Dr. Whately should, in *any* case, plead a popular usage of speech as of any weight in a philosophic argument? Still more, how is it possible in *this* case, where the accuracy of the popular usage is the very thing in debate, so that, if pleaded at all, it must be pleaded as its own justification?¹⁵¹

This is ostensibly a criticism of Whately's manner of treating the question, rather than of his apparent position itself; but here too there is a manifest inference, and it is that

¹⁵⁰ "Lessing," XI, 160.

¹⁵¹ X, 131-132.

Whately's position is incorrect: metre is not an adequate criterion of what is poetry. This is the more clear from a footnote De Quincey appends to the phrase "poetry as distinguished from prose":

. . . Here is one of the many instances in which a false answer is prepared beforehand by falsely shaping the question. The accessary circumstance, as "*distinguished from prose*," already prepares a false answer by the very terms of the problem. Poetry *cannot* be distinguished from prose without presupposing the whole question at issue. Those who deny that metre is the characteristic distinction of poetry deny, by implication, that prose *can* be truly opposed to poetry. Some have imagined that the proper opposition was between poetry and science; but, suppose that this is an imperfect opposition, and suppose even that there is no adequate opposition, or counterpole, this is no more than happens in many other cases. One of two poles is often without a name, even where the idea is fully assignable in analysis. But at all events the expression, as "distinguished from prose" is a subtle instance of a *petitio principii*.¹⁸²

Although here, too, De Quincey maintains a pose of neutrality, the direction of his own thinking seems to be indicated by the pains he takes to define the logical possibilities of the situation if metre is denied as the characteristic distinction of poetry.

In another context he speaks of "the separation of the two great fields, prose and poetry, or of the mind impassioned or unimpassioned" as never being perfectly accomplished in some languages, particularly in the Oriental, "where the common edicts of government or provincial regulations of police assume a ridiculous masquerade dress of rhetorical or even of poetic animation."¹⁸³ Here there is expressed a tacit acceptance of a real distinction, but the distinction is not between metrical and nonmetrical composition but between impassioned and unimpassioned speech.

He has the same ideas in mind when in his "Language," he makes further reference to races in a "state of imperfect expansion, both civilly and intellectually, under which the separation has not fully taken place between poetry and

¹⁸² "Rhetoric," X, 131 n.

¹⁸³ "The English Language," XIV, 160.

prose." In such races the "subdued colouring . . . of prose has not yet been (to speak physiologically) secreted."¹⁵⁴

The essential distinction, then, for De Quincey is that between impassioned and unimpassioned speech. In a philosophical definition, we may say, he would identify these respectively with poetry and prose. And yet, no more than other men can he escape from ordinarily using the terms "poetry" and "prose" to refer to metrical and nonmetrical composition, if for no other reason than that the employment of metre usually is a sign of impassioned expression. This is clearly shown in his reference to one class of his own writings as "modes of impassioned prose."¹⁵⁵ It is shown also in the important passage in the essay "Style" where he discusses the functions and the historical employment of metre:

. . . metre must always have been the earliest vehicle for public enunciations of truth among men, for these obvious reasons:—1. That, if metre rises above the standard of ordinary household life, so must any truth of importance and singularity enough to challenge a public utterance; 2. That, because religious communications will always have taken a metrical form by a natural association of feeling, whatsoever is invested with a privileged character will seek something of a religious sanction by assuming the same external shape; and, 3. That expressions, or emphatic verbal forms, which are naturally courted for the sake of pointed effect, receive a justification from metre, as being already a departure from common usage to begin with, whereas in plain prose they would appear so many affectations.¹⁵⁶

The sentence that follows is an admirable summary of the reasons for the use of metre for both impassioned and unimpassioned themes.

. . . Metre is naturally and necessarily adopted in cases of impassioned themes, for the very obvious reason that rhythmus is both a cause of impassioned feeling, an ally of such feeling, and a natural effect of it; but upon other subjects, *not* impassioned, metre is also a subtle ally, because it serves to introduce and to reconcile with our sense of propriety various arts of condensation, of antithesis, and other rhetorical effects, which, without the metre (as a key for harmonizing them) would strike the feelings as unnatural or as full of affectation. . . . Hence,

¹⁵⁴ X, 248-249.

¹⁵⁵ "De Quincey's General Preface of 1853," I, 14.

¹⁵⁶ X, 171-172.

for the very earliest stages of society, it will be mere nature that prompts men to metre; it is a mode of inspiration, it is a promise of something preternatural; and less than preternatural cannot be any possible emergency that should call for a public address.

. . . Afterwards, as truth begins to enlarge itself—as truth loses something of its sanctity by descending amongst human details—that mode of exalting it, and of courting attention, is dictated by artifice, which originally was a mere necessity of nature raised above herself.¹⁵⁷

This passage really constitutes an explanation of why metre ceased to be a genuine criterion of impassioned speech, the reason being that metre came to be used on occasion as an artifice for attracting attention. But it is not alone that metre ceased always to signify passion. The subsequent paragraphs indicate that prose, as nonmetrical composition, came at last to be used on occasion for the expression of impassioned thought.

. . . Prose . . . was something of a discovery. If not great invention, at least great courage, would be required for the man who should first swim without the bladders of metre . . . that man must have had *triplex aes* about his *praecordia* who first dared to come forward with pure prose as the vehicle for any impassioned form of truth.¹⁵⁸

Herodotus, in De Quincey's view, was "the first respectable artist in prose." And "it is pretty clear that Herodotus stood, and meant to stand, on that isthmus between the regions of poetry and blank unimpassioned prose which in modern literature is occupied by such works as *Mort d'Arthur*."¹⁵⁹

Such, then, is De Quincey's view of prose and poetry. Accepting the terms on most occasions as signs of their conventional meanings—meanings determined by external form, he holds the essential and philosophical distinction to be one between modes or keys of expression which are impassioned and unimpassioned and which sometimes exist in separation from the external forms most often associated with them. In all this he is, of course, in agreement with the practice and the theory of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and of romanticism generally. His explanation of metre differs from Wordsworth's in that it stresses positive instrumentality more than

¹⁵⁷ "Style," X, 172.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

delight as an end in itself or as an alleviation of the painful; and it is in this very way closer to Coleridge's.

Prose in the philosophical sense, which is to say, prose as unimpassioned speech, is not for De Quincey a mode of power; it is instead a mode of knowledge. Impassioned prose and impassioned verse represent two different keys of power. Unimpassioned verse is a mode either of knowledge or of intellectual pleasure, but not of power.

CHAPTER V

Style

I. WHAT STYLE IS: PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

IT HAS already been shown that when De Quincey thinks about literature in terms of his theory of literature as power he is preoccupied with the nature and value of final effects rather than with the art vehicle or process. In our examination of his literary theory thus far we have come upon but one mention of the general subject of style or form—his passing reference, in the 1823 definition of literature, to the nonsubordination of style to matter as a criterion of literature proper; and on this occasion his mind turned quickly from the idea of form to that of effect and function. But that is not to say that he does not concern himself with the subject of style; it is to suggest only that he does not bring his speculations on style into effective relation with his theory of literature as power. An analysis of his comments on style forms an essential part of our study of his literary theory. These comments are of special importance for the reason that they throw into relief the central complication or contradiction of his thought.

De Quincey's longest critical essay is the one entitled "Style"—it runs to well over a hundred pages in the Masson edition of his works—and there are other *loci critici* dealing with the subject which are of great importance. But it may be said at once that the value of the "Style" itself is hardly commensurate with its length or pretentiousness and that any detailed survey here of its content would be profitless even as an incidental part of our study. The essay does indeed

contain one or two passages of the highest value, but considered as a whole it may be described as the most freely discursive of De Quincey's writings (which is saying a great deal) and as the one which fails most signally in carrying out its set program.¹ Part I serves as a general introduction; its theme is the failure of the English to appreciate the importance of style, particularly its importance in everyday life, and it includes criticism of specific abuses which characterize English speech and writing. Part II enters upon a historical survey of style and stylistic theory which continues through the remainder of the essay, and which, though it is described in Part III as preliminary to mapping out all the difficulties of style and all "the possible subdivisions and sections amongst the resources of the rhetorician"² and to offering certain specific practical counsels, fails itself to attain completion. There is much in the essay that is interesting for its own sake, but there is only one passage which makes a real contribution to De Quincey's theory of style. That passage appears in quite incidental fashion in Part IV, being involved in an explanation of why we are entitled to expect—though the expectation is not fulfilled—a high development of the theory of style among the Greeks.

Our method, therefore, will be to extract from their various contexts, including the essay "Style," De Quincey's most essential pronouncements on the subject, and to compare and integrate their thought in so far as that is possible. His theory of style is extremely difficult to partition, inasmuch as its different aspects are so immediately related to each other, but we can best begin with a consideration of the various

¹ The fact that the essay was written in four parts, which appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* between July, 1840, and February, 1841, probably goes far toward explaining its defects. De Quincey made it his business to write four substantial articles on the one subject; the liberal scale of the enterprise apparently gave him an illusory sense of unlimited opportunity to amplify even the most subordinate ideas in the fashion congenial to his habits of thought; and the result was that he had to bring his series to a close when he was no more than well started on the treatment announced. Even his prospectus of the topics to be dealt with is not given before the beginning of Part III.

² "Style," X, 192.

meanings he attaches to the word "style." Because his concept of style is ultimately inseparable from his views of the different functions of style and the different modes of its relation to thought, such a consideration will, however, be but preliminary.

De Quincey's most direct definition of the term is found in Part II of "Style":

. . . The word *style* has with us a twofold meaning: one, the narrow meaning, expressing the mere *synthesis onomaton*, the syntaxis or combination of words into sentences; the other of far wider extent, and expressing all possible relations that can arise between thoughts and words—the total effect of a writer as derived from manner. Style may be viewed as an *organic* thing and as a *mechanic* thing. By organic, we mean that which, being acted upon, reacts, and which propagates the communicated power without loss. By mechanic, that which, being impressed with motion, cannot throw it back without loss, and therefore soon comes to an end. The human body is an elaborate system of organs; it is sustained by organs. But the human body is exercised as a machine, and as such may be viewed in the arts of riding, dancing, leaping, &c., subject to the laws of motion and equilibrium. Now, the use of words is an organic thing, in so far as language is connected with thoughts and modified by thoughts. It is a mechanic thing, in so far as words in combination determine or modify each other. The science of style as an organ of thought, of style in relation to the ideas and feelings, might be called the *organology* of style. The science of style considered as a machine, in which words act upon words, and through a particular grammar, might be called the *mechanology* of style . . . it is of great importance not to confound the functions: that function by which style maintains a commerce with thought, and that by which it chiefly communicates with grammar and with words.³ \

That style is both a mechanical thing and an organic one, and that it is useful to distinguish between these two functions, are ideas which at once recommend themselves; De Quincey's distinction, indeed, has the air of being one of the fundamentally clarifying sort to the elaboration of which he often bends his mind. But one is struck by the peculiar extremes which his definitions of the senses of the word "style" represent. On the one hand we have an especially narrow meaning—the mere combination of words into co-

³ X, 163-164.

herent sentences; on the other, an extremely broad meaning—"the total effect of a writer as derived from manner." The one meaning is so strait as to have the effect of eliminating itself almost at once from our analysis, since it is obvious that the theory of style we seek to formulate is not one that concerns itself with the mechanics of sentence construction. The other meaning is so comprehensive as to leave us with as many questions as we started out with. What are all the possible relations that can arise between thoughts and words? And what, precisely, is meant by "manner"? To put these questions is but to ask, What is style and what relation does it bear to matter?

One is inclined to think that De Quincey's distinction between "mechanology" and "organology" would be more useful if he had not applied the first of those two ideas in so narrow a way. The use of words is a "mechanic thing, in so far as words in combination determine or modify each other" "through a particular grammar." A sentence is perhaps more easily viewed as a mere machine than is any other unit of composition, yet is there not a mechanism of building sentences into paragraphs, paragraphs into larger units, and these larger units into an entire composition? Are there not, that is to say, rules or principles governing the composition of larger units, which are applicable to every situation, or at least to given types of situations, and which can be considered in the abstract—apart from a peculiar relationship to a particular body of thought?

Sometimes when De Quincey speaks of style he appears to have in mind a meaning at once less narrow than mere sentence building and less broad than that conveyed by the phrases he uses to describe style as an organic thing. He refers, for example, to "style, or (to speak by the most general expression) the management of language."⁴ "Language" is a term that suggests words in themselves, apart from thought. Again, he speaks of "style in our modern sense, as a theory of composition, as an art of constructing sentences and weaving them into coherent wholes."⁵ Here the narrow meaning is

⁴ "Language," X, 260.

⁵ "Style," X, 218.

transcended—but included. And the list he gives of “the graces of style” in the following sentence, taken from one of his numerous animadversions upon the style of Kant, is indicative of what appears to be the specific content of his concept of style on many occasions:

. . . How, for instance, I ask, could that man have had any sense for the graces of style in the largest meaning of that word,—that is, for the mode of presenting a subject, of effecting the transitions and connexions; for the artifices by which parts are brought forward into prominent relief, or withdrawn from too conspicuous a station; for the arts of preparation, of recapitulation, of peroration, together with the whole world of refinements which belong to a beautiful and impressive diction,—how, I demand, could *he* have had any organ for the perception of all this who in his own case, and in those works which he most of all designed as the classical monuments of his own power, shows uniformly that, in a question of *manner*, he knows of no higher a purpose that a man can or ought to have than in any way whatsoever, no matter how clumsily, disordinately, ungracefully,—no matter with what perplexity or confusion, tautology or circumlocution,—to deliver himself of a meaning?^o

Here, to be sure, De Quincey speaks expressly of “style in the largest meaning of that word,” and he does omit specific reference to mere sentence building. Perhaps we should accept this as a statement of what he means by style as an organic thing, as an organ of thought. And yet the more positive conception of “style . . . as a theory of composition, as an art of constructing sentences and weaving them into coherent wholes” merges insensibly into the idea of style as the deploying, connecting, and accenting of the larger units of composition—which is the aspect of style on which the principal emphasis is placed in the comment on Kant. And we have already suggested that composition in this sense is, in part at least, a mechanical matter—a thing reducible to rule. It is significant that De Quincey himself speaks of the *artifices* by which parts are “brought forward.”

It may at first seem pointless to quarrel with the line of division as De Quincey draws it between mechanology and organology and between style in the narrow sense and in the

^o “Kant in His Miscellaneous Essays,” VIII, 91–92.

broad—in this place, at any rate, where we are concerned only with understanding his meaning. But the conclusion to which one who studies all the data is driven is that De Quincey is confused, or inconsistent, in drawing that line.

If the word "style," taken in the broad sense of an organic thing, refers only, or chiefly, to the techniques of arraying and emphasizing the elements of thought, then this meaning is less broad than it first appeared to be when De Quincey spoke of "all possible relations that can arise between thoughts and words" and of language as something which is modified by thought; and surely less broad than is suggested by a very radical one-sentence definition in the *Posthumous Works*: "Style is the disentangling of thoughts or ideas reciprocally involved in each other."⁷

That De Quincey's conception of organology is confused is indicated by certain of the examples he gives of problems which would fall under the head of organology. One of these is punctuation, of which he says:

. . . Punctuation, trivial as such an innovation may seem, was the product of typography; and it is interesting to trace the effects upon style even of that one slight addition to the resources of logic. Previously a man was driven to depend for his security against misunderstanding upon the pure virtue of his syntax . . . Now, punctuation was an artificial machinery for maintaining the integrity of the sense against all mistakes of the writer . . .⁸

It is difficult to understand how De Quincey can regard a study of a change from one type of machinery to another as a problem in organology.

But the most conclusive evidence that his thought is imperfectly articulated, and incapable of perfect articulation in the shape in which it exists, occurs in connection with the statement of his objectives to be found at the end of Part I and the beginning of Part III of the essay. One promise that De Quincey makes (but does not keep) is that he will offer a few practical suggestions about style which will apply

⁷ *The Posthumous Works of Thomas De Quincey*, edited by Alexander H. Japp (London, 1891-93) (hereafter referred to as *Posthumous Works*), I, 225.

⁸ "Style," X, 164-165.

to its mechanology: "Half a dozen rules for evading the most frequently recurring forms of awkwardness, of obscurity, of misproportion, and of double meaning."⁹ And he anticipates the objection that a mechanical system of training for style would result in monotony of effect in this way:

. . . This [objection] does not touch *us*: the mechanism *we* speak of will apply to no meritorious qualities of style, but to its faults, and, above all, to its awkwardness; in fact, to all that now constitutes the *friction* of style, the needless joltings and retardations of our fluent motion. As to the motion itself in all that is positive in its derivation, in its exciting impulses, in its speed, and its characteristic varieties, it will remain unaffected. The modes of human feeling are inexhaustible; the forms by which feeling connects itself with thought are indefeasibly natural; the channels through which both impress themselves upon language are infinite. All these are imperturbable by human art; they are past the reach of mechanism . . . in that sense under which we all have an interest in its free movements it [style] will for ever remain free In that sense under which it ever *can* be mechanized we have all an interest in wishing that it should be so.¹⁰

Here surely, in spite of the fact that the suggestions De Quincey means to offer as to mechanology doubtless apply to matters of sentence construction, he rises to a more philosophically adequate conception of the mechanical versus the nonmechanical in style, and identifies the nonmechanical with what is at once positive and free.

He does not, it is true, explicitly identify what are here referred to as the free movements of style with what, earlier in the same essay, he has named organology, but the conclusion seems irresistible that such an identification answers to the inner logic of his thought. If the conclusion is justified, so also is the contention that such techniques of marshaling thought as can be reduced to rule (whether pertaining to the sentence or to the larger units of composition) are properly a part of the mechanology of style, and that a more meaningful division of the senses of the word "style" than the one between sentence construction and general effect as derived from manner is that between the teachable techniques of shaping and deploying the various units of composition and

⁹ "Style," X, 167.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

such effects of manner as arise out of the free movements of thought and feeling.

Perhaps we may say that the conception just presented is one that De Quincey arrives at on occasion, but fails to sustain. [The result is that there are for him three, rather than two, senses of the word "style." There is style as mere sentence building. There is style as the artful selection of words and the artful arrangement of parts. And, finally, there is style as the manner in which the infinite modes of human thought and feeling impress themselves upon language, or utilize language as a vehicle of being.] The essential contrast would seem to be between the second and the third meanings, and it is to these respectively that one feels the designations "mechanic" and "organic" might most appropriately have been given. Or the division might be described as one between prose style and poetic style, if the latter term is taken in the widest philosophical sense.

One would not object to the presence in De Quincey's discussions of several senses of the word "style" if only he were careful to distinguish between them. But in numerous passages the sense intended is not only ambiguous to the reader, but it appears to be indeterminate in De Quincey's own mind. Often, also, there occur unannounced shifts from one sense to another.

We have tried to exclude from this preliminary consideration questions of De Quincey's ideas of the functions of style and of the separability or inseparability of style from matter. These questions are the subject matter of the next section. But it will be well to state here, although such a definition has implications as to function and the problem of separability, that on some occasions De Quincey implies the definition that style is ornament, as when he refers to the "arts of style and ornamental composition as the ministerial part of Rhetoric,"¹¹ or when he criticizes the English for their tendency to degrade the value of the ornamental." Though style as ornament may be related to the meanings already

¹¹ "Rhetoric," X, 92.

defined, it may also be set up as having the character of a fourth definition.

Finally, we may say that there is one concept of style which is not present in De Quincey's thought, or which at any rate enters it only occasionally: that is the idea of style or manner as the sum of the idiosyncrasies of a particular writer, growing out of the peculiar accidents of his temperament and experience. The evidence for this statement it will be more convenient to present in a later part of the chapter.

II. THE FUNCTIONS OF STYLE

It is in the closing pages of the essay "Language" that we find De Quincey's most systematic statement of what he conceives to be the differing functions of style. Despite its considerable length, it will be well to present the essential passage in full before entering upon analysis of any portion of it. De Quincey has set forth the opinion that in their attention to matters of style the English occupy a middle position between the French and the Germans, the French being scrupulous in their handling of language, the Germans barbarous. He proceeds:

. . . Agreeably to the general cast of the national character, our tendency is to degrade the value of the ornamental, whenever it is brought before us under any suggestion of comparison or rivalry with the substantial or grossly useful. Viewing the thoughts as the substantial objects in a book, we are apt to regard the manner of presenting these thoughts as a secondary or even trivial concern. The one we typify as the metallic substance, the silver or gold, which constitutes the true value that cannot perish in a service of plate; whereas the style too generally, in *our* estimate, represents the mere casual fashion given to the plate by the artist—an adjunct that any change of public taste may degrade into a positive disadvantage. But in this we English err greatly; and by these three capital oversights:—

1. It is certain that style, or (to speak by the most general expression) the management of language, ranks amongst the fine arts, and is able therefore to yield a separate intellectual pleasure quite apart from the interest of the subject treated. So far it is already one error to rate the value of style as if it were necessarily a secondary or subordinate thing. On the contrary, style has an *absolute* value, like the product of any other exquisite art, quite distinct from the value of the subject about which it is employed, and irrelatively to the subject; precisely as

the fine workmanship of Scopas the Greek, or of Cellini the Florentine, is equally valued by the connoisseur, whether embodied in bronze or marble, in an ivory or a golden vase. But

2. If we *do* submit to this narrow valuation of style, founded on the interest of the subject to which it is ministerial, still, even on that basis, we English commit a capital blunder which the French earnestly and sincerely escape; for, assuming that the thoughts involve the primary interest, still it must make all the difference in the world to the success of those thoughts whether they are treated in the way best fitted to expel the doubts or darkness that may have settled upon them, and, secondly, in cases where the business is not to establish new convictions, but to carry old convictions into operative life and power, whether they are treated in the way best fitted to rekindle in the mind a practical sense of their value. Style has two separate functions: first, to brighten the *intelligibility* of a subject which is obscure to the understanding; secondly, to regenerate the normal *power* and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities. Darkness gathers upon many a theme, sometimes from previous mistreatment, but oftener from original perplexities investing its very nature. Upon the style it is, if we take that word in its largest sense,—upon the skill and art of the developer,—that these perplexities greatly depend for their illumination. Look, again, at the other class of cases, when the difficulties are not for the understanding but for the practical sensibilities as applicable to the services of life. The subject, suppose, is already understood sufficiently; but it is lifeless as a motive. It is not new light that is to be communicated, but old torpor that is to be dispersed. The writer is not summoned to convince, but to persuade. Decaying lineaments are to be retraced, and faded colouring to be refreshed. Now, these offices of style are really not essentially below the level of those other offices attached to the original *discovery* of truth. He that to an old conviction, long since inoperative and dead, gives the regeneration that carries it back into the heart as a vital power of action—he, again, that by new light, or by light trained to flow through a new channel, reconciles to the understanding a truth which hitherto had seemed dark or doubtful—both these men are really, *quoad* us that benefit by their services, the *discoverers* of the truth. Yet these results are amongst the possible gifts of style. Light to *see* the road, power to *advance along* it—such being amongst the promises and proper functions of style, it is a capital error, under the idea of its ministeriality, to undervalue this great organ of the advancing intellect—an organ which is equally important considered as a tool for the culture and *popularization* of truth and also (if it had no use at all in that way) as a mode *per se* of the beautiful and a fountain of intellectual pleasure. The vice of that appreciation which we English apply to style lies in representing it as a mere ornamental accident of written composition—a trivial embellishment, like the mouldings of furniture, the cornices of ceilings, or the

arabesques of tea-urns. On the contrary, it is a product of art the rarest, subtlest, and most intellectual; and, like other products of the fine arts, it is then finest when it is most eminently disinterested—that is, most conspicuously detached from gross palpable uses. Yet, in very many cases, it really *has* the obvious uses of that gross palpable order; as in the cases just noticed, when it gives light to the understanding, or power to the will, removing obscurities from one set of truths, and into another circulating the life-blood of sensibility. In these cases, meantime, the style is contemplated as a thing separable from the thoughts; in fact, as the *dress* of the thoughts—a robe that may be laid aside at pleasure. But

3. There arises a case entirely different, where style cannot be regarded as a *dress* or alien covering, but where style becomes the *incarnation* of the thoughts. The human body is not the dress or apparel of the human spirit: far more mysterious is the mode of their union. Call the two elements A and B; then it is impossible to point out A as existing aloof from B, or *vice versa*. A exists in and through B; B exists in and through A. No profound observer can have failed to observe this illustrated in the capacities of style. Imagery is sometimes not the mere alien apparelling of a thought, and of a nature to be detached from the thought, but is the coefficient that, being super-added to something else, absolutely *makes* the thought as a *third* and separate existence.

In this third case, our English tendency to undervalue style goes more deeply into error than in the other two. In those two we simply underrate the enormous services that are or might be rendered by style to the interests of truth and human thinking; but in the third case we go near to abolish a mode of existence. This is not so impossible an offence as might be supposed. There are many ideas in Leibnitz, in Kant, in the schoolmen, in Plato at times, and certainly in Aristotle (as the ideas of antiperistasis, entelecheia, &c.), which are only to be arrested and realized by a signal *effort*—by a struggle and a *nisus* both of reflection and of large combination. Now, where so much depends upon an effort—on a spasmodic strain,—to fail by a hair's breadth is to collapse. For instance, the idea involved in the word transcendental, as used in the critical philosophy, illustrates the metaphysical relations of style.¹²

Style, De Quincey tells us here, is (1) sometimes an end in itself, an art in its own right, (2) sometimes an instrument to something beyond itself, either (a) to making a subject more intelligible to the mind, or (b) to renewing the power inherent in a subject, and (3) sometimes one aspect of a unity in which it is fused with thought.

¹² X, 259–262.

We have already briefly noticed De Quincey's view that style may be regarded as a fine art in itself, and have seen that it contradicts the theory that the object of literature and all the arts is power.¹³ For De Quincey nowhere speaks of power as an effect which arises from style as detached from matter; the effect he does assign to style as a thing in itself is pleasure—pleasure in beauty.

The following passage gives certain indications as to what De Quincey means by beauty in style:

. . . Style, diction, the construction of sentences, are ideas perfectly without meaning to the German writer. If a whole book were made up of a single sentence, all collateral or subordinate ideas being packed into it as parenthetical intercalations . . . the true German would see in all *that* no want of art, would recognise no opportunities thrown away for the display of beauty A sentence, even when insulated and viewed apart for itself, is a subject for complex art: even *so far* it is capable of multiform beauty, and liable to a whole *nosology* of malconformations. But it is in the *relation* of sentences, in what Horace terms their "*junctura*," that the true life of composition resides. The mode of their *nexus*, the way in which one sentence is made to arise out of another, and to prepare the opening for a third: this is the great loom in which the textile process of the moving intellect reveals itself and prospers.

Kant, being obtuse and deaf with regard to language and its capacities, wrote sentences of enormous span.

. . . Parts so remote as the beginning and end of such a sentence can have no sensible relation to each other: not much as regards their logic, but none at all as regards their more *sensuous* qualities—rhythmus, for instance, or the continuity of metaphor. And it is clear that, if the internal relations of a sentence fade under the extravagant misproportion of its scale, *a fortiori* must the outer relations Periods, and clauses of periods, modify each other, and build up a whole then only when the parts are shown *as* parts, cohering and conspiring to a common result.¹⁴

It would appear that the beauty of style has two aspects, an intellectual and a sensuous aspect, but it is the intellectual aspect upon which De Quincey places most emphasis: the articulation of elements into an organic design, the counterpoint of words, sentences, and larger units. He has indeed

¹³ See *supra*, pp. 98, 101 f.

¹⁴ "Language," X, 258-259.

defined the value of style as an end in itself as *intellectual* pleasure. It may be asked to what extent, if at all, this intellectual pleasure involves perception of utility, to what extent, that is, the beauty is a beauty of utility, of adaptation to the end of communication. The point is a difficult one. That De Quincey asserts style to be finest "when it is most eminently disinterested—that is, most conspicuously detached from gross palpable uses"¹⁵ does not really decide it, for the gross uses in question are uses to which communication itself is put. But we may say that there is reason to suppose that for him the beauty of style is by no means merely a beauty of utility or adaptation. One recalls his footnote to a passage in the *Laocoon* in which he argues that necessity may have invented dress but that afterwards "dress is cultivated as an end *per se*, both directly for its beauty, and as a means of suggesting many pleasing ideas of rank, power, youth, sex, or profession."¹⁶ It is precisely as a dress that he is considering style. Now the necessity referred to in connection with dress corresponds to the gross uses of style. After necessity is out of the way, dress is still cultivated for two purposes—for beauty *and* for suggesting certain ideas. Is the beauty merely that of the skill with which it suggests these ideas? One would hardly say this; one hardly believes that this is what De Quincey has in mind. Design is beautiful for itself apart from its efficiency in suggesting or communicating.

There is something unsatisfactory about the fact that De Quincey separates the case in which style may be regarded as an end in itself from that in which it becomes the incarnation of thought. The separation might at first appear to be logically necessary, it is true, for when style and thought are one, can style any longer be spoken of as a thing in itself? But it will not do to be misled by the mere words that are used to describe relationships. Body and mind are one in precisely the sense that, according to De Quincey, style and matter are; indeed the relationship of body and mind is the very analogy he employs to explain that of style and matter.

¹⁵ "Language," X, 261.

¹⁶ XI, 195 n.

And yet we are still able to speak of the beauty of a body, and to delight in physical beauty apart from any relation to mind. The separation that De Quincey decrees is unsatisfactory for the reason that we must suppose him to conceive of style as inseparable from matter (as the incarnation of matter) in a large part of literature, including the most lofty part, and it seems incredible that if the beauty of style is ever to be enjoyed for its own sake, it should cease to be so enjoyed in this literature. Enjoyment of it may be inseparable from interest in the subject matter (although this is open to question), but enjoyment must yet persist as a recognizable factor in the entire experience.

That style may exist simultaneously as an end in itself and as the instrument of "gross palpable uses"—that functions one and two, in other words, may coexist—is evident from De Quincey's discussion. But since the beauty of style is finest when such uses are not being served, and since he limits (though, as we have just suggested, inadvisably) style as a fine art in itself to instances in which it is capable of being regarded separately from matter, it would seem to follow that there is a class of literature which exists for the sake of style alone. This is a point which De Quincey fails to treat directly. It will be remembered, however, that he discusses the literature of manners (as opposed to the literature of the elementary affections) as one "in which brilliant powers of execution, applied to conceptions of a very inferior range, are allowed to establish a classical rank."¹⁷ Again, he regards didactic poetry as a genre which exists for the display of difficult and brilliant effects. Finally, if we interpret the idea of style liberally enough, we might even say that he conceives of rhetoric as a literature of stylistic beauty.¹⁸ But in every one of these applications it is necessary to stretch the idea of style beyond the point justified by De Quincey's remarks on style as an end per se in the final pages of "Language."

¹⁷ "Recollections of Charles Lamb," III, 89; see *supra*, p. 169.

¹⁸ We shall see, in the next chapter, that De Quincey defines style as having no more than a ministerial status in rhetoric. But in making that definition he has in mind a relatively narrow sense of the word.

We now turn to a more particular consideration of De Quincey's second distinction, in which style is to be valued for its palpable uses. "Style has two separate functions: first, to brighten the *intelligibility* of a subject which is obscure to the understanding; secondly, to regenerate the normal *power* and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities."¹⁹ These functions, it would appear, are parallel to those of literature itself—knowledge and power—which is logical enough. Style makes available the knowledge and the power locked up in thought. Yet is the power of which De Quincey speaks in this context exactly the same as the power he has in mind elsewhere?

It is true that there is much in his language which has a familiar ring. He speaks of dispersing old *torpor*, of carrying convictions *into the heart*, of circulating the life-blood of *sensibility*. But it is a *practical* sense of the value of old convictions that style is ministerial to; it is the *practical* sensibilities as *applicable to the services of life* that are appealed to; persuasion is the object; the power is a power of *action*, of *will*.

Now there is, as we have seen,²⁰ in the 1848 definition of literature as power (though not in the 1823 definition), a suggestion of the practical usefulness of communicating power: the sensibilities aroused by the literature of power "germinate into vital activities." But we have observed that such an effect is not primary in De Quincey's mind. Power, as communicated by the literature of power, may, and indeed often does, express itself in external action, or at least take the form of readiness for such action, but it is a sufficient end in itself. Feeling for its own sake, that is, deep sympathy with truth, is the real end. The essential actions involved are not practical, but are the actions of feeling itself.

Perhaps we may explain the emphasis laid on the practicality of the power to which style is ministerial as resulting from a momentary confusion in De Quincey's mind—a confusion between the idea that style is practical in so far as it

¹⁹ "Language," X, 260-261.

²⁰ *Supra*, p. 133.

serves the end of bringing out the power in a subject and the idea that the power so brought out is a practical thing. Or it may be that De Quincey is intentionally thinking of the literature of practical persuasion and of the part played by style in it, rather than of the literature of power in general. But if this interpretation is correct, what becomes of the literature in which power is an end in itself? Shall we say that it corresponds to the case in which style and matter are blended in one, and in which, therefore, style may not be referred to as serving the ends of something not itself? Of this proposition we are not yet in a position to judge.

In any event, it is possible to argue that in defining one function of style as that of giving power to the will, De Quincey is confusing the effect of the composition as a whole with the service performed in it by style. Perhaps this is best seen by comparison of this definition with that of style's twin function of making ideas intelligible. Intelligibility is a function of knowledge, but it is scarcely knowledge itself. It is not, therefore, strictly a parallel category to power. Should not De Quincey have given the second practical function of style a name standing for something which bears the same relation to power that intelligibility does to knowledge? Perhaps "ingratiating" would be a satisfactory term, if taken in its widest and entirely neutral sense—ingratiating as the capturing of the reader's attention and interest, as the inducing of a desired attitude toward the thought. Language itself is a means of ingratiating (as of intelligibility), but power is ultimately rooted in thought (as is knowledge).

We turn finally to De Quincey's third distinction, where style is no longer the dress of thought but its mysterious incarnation, "the coefficient that, being superadded to something else, absolutely *makes* the thought as a *third* and separate existence."²¹ One could wish that De Quincey had pushed on to an analysis of the nature of the "something else" to which style is added to create the thought, or, falling short of this, had given us a single term for it that would definitely relate it to one or more of the commonly recognized

²¹ "Language," X, 262.

factors in the whole creative process. In the absence of such help from De Quincey it is almost imperative that we attempt to develop for him what appear to be the possibilities of his thought. Let us therefore determine to call his "something else" the subject matter, meaning the data or materials of the writing, carefully reserving the term "thought" for that which emerges in the end—out of the combination of style and subject matter. It may be difficult to do this, inasmuch as the materials themselves contain, or may contain, particular thoughts, but unless we do it confusion is bound to result—as we intend to show that it does for De Quincey. The thought, it may be said, is not necessarily *a* thought, that is, an idea or concept or proposition; it may take the form of an effect or feeling. In any event, it is the theme, as distinguished from the data.

And here the question arises, How can a process in which style is added to certain materials to produce, by an effort "both of reflection and of large combination,"²² a mysterious third existence be anything other than creative? May we not say, therefore, that creativity is the criterion of De Quincey's third case as distinguished from his second? In his second case the thought is not something new; it is something upon which doubt or darkness has settled, or the impressiveness of which has become dormant. But in his third case the thought does not exist until style has done its work.

If the criterion of the third distinction is creativity, it would seem that this is precisely applicable to the literature of power or literature proper, every work of which De Quincey recognizes as representing a unique embodiment of power. If this identification can be established it will introduce a certain principle of order into his theory of style, will integrate that theory with his general theory of literature. But is the identification borne out by De Quincey's own statements in the present context and in others?

His discussion of his third case in the present context is curiously brief, as though his energy of analysis had suddenly flagged. Of course it must be remembered that his general

²² "Language," X, 262.

purpose is only to show that style should not be undervalued; his contention that style is sometimes inseparable from matter is presented as an argument in support of this proposition, and he is not, at the moment, interested in analyzing the view for its own sake. Even so, his account of style as the incarnation of thought is less full than we might expect. But what is most surprising is that his illustrations are derived exclusively from the literature of philosophy. This surely stands in the way of an exclusive identification of his third case with the literature of power. Yet it leaves the possibility that the literature of power falls under the third case and that it is in the literature of power that the third case is most conspicuously realized. As for the illustrations from the literature of philosophy, it is important to note that though they involve a situation where creative thought of another kind than that embodied in literature proper is in process of birth, the criterion of creativity is still satisfied. And yet the works of the philosophers alluded to surely cannot be said to remain unique incarnations of thought, as can works of literature proper. What remains unique is only certain elements in them: namely, combinations of idea and style in thought that lives only through a technical terminology. It is style as technical terminology that De Quincey appears to have chiefly in mind at the end of the passage.

We are now prepared to improve our understanding of De Quincey's conception of the situation in which style is the incarnation of thought by examining another, and a far more complete, discussion of the topic in what is easily the most valuable passage in "Style." Here De Quincey explicitly sets forth a criterion of the distinction in question.

... A man who has absolute facts to communicate from some branch of study external to himself, as physiology, suppose, or anatomy, or astronomy, is careless of style; or at least he may be so, because he is independent of style, for what he has to communicate neither readily admits, nor much needs, any graces in the mode of communication; the matter transcends and oppresses the manner. The matter tells without any manner at all. But he who has to treat a vague question, such as Cicero calls a *quaestio infinita*, where everything is to be finished out of his own peculiar feelings, or his own way of viewing things (in

contradistinction to a *quaestio finita*, where determinate *data* from without already furnish the main materials), soon finds that the manner of treating it not only transcends the matter, but very often, and in a very great proportion, is the matter. In very many subjective exercises of the mind,—as, for instance, in that class of poetry which has been formally designated by this epithet (meditative poetry, we mean, in opposition to the Homeric, which is intensely objective), the problem before the writer is to project his own inner mind; to bring out consciously what yet lurks by involution in many unanalysed feelings; in short, to pass through a prism and radiate into distinct elements what previously had been even to himself but dim and confused ideas intermixed with each other. Now, in such cases, the skill with which detention or conscious arrest is given to the evanescent, external projection to what is internal, outline to what is fluxionary, and body to what is vague,—all this depends entirely on the command over language as the sole means of embodying ideas; and in such cases the style, or, in the largest sense, *manner*, is confluent with the matter. But, at all events, even by those who are most impatient of any subtleties, or what they consider “metaphysical” distinctions, thus much must be conceded: viz. that those who rest upon external facts, tangible realities, and circumstantial details,—in short, generally upon the *objective*, whether in a case of narration or of argument,—must for ever be less dependent upon style than those who have to draw upon their own understandings and their own peculiar feelings for the furniture and matter of their composition.²³

De Quincey proceeds to illustrate his proposition by remarking that it is a matter of common experience that lawyers fail as public speakers in the House of Commons. And why? It is because they are accustomed to lean upon a brief of specific facts, and because “each separate transition, and the distribution of the general subject, offered themselves spontaneously in a law case; the logic was given as well as the method.” But in a House of Commons oration,

... although sometimes there may occur statements of fact and operose calculations, still these are never more than a text, at the very best, for the political discussion, but often no more than a subsequent illustration or proof attached to some one of its heads. The main staple of any long speeches must always be some general view of national policy; and, in Cicero's language, such a view must always be *infinita* ... shaped and drawn from the funds of one's own understanding.

Thus there is always the anxious question, "What shall I say next?"

This case explains why it is that all subjective branches of study favour the cultivation of style. Whatsoever is entirely independent of the mind, and external to it, is generally equal to its own enunciation But, the more closely any exercise of mind is connected with what is internal and individual in the sensibilities,—that is, with what is philosophically termed *subjective*,—precisely in that degree, and the more subtly, does the style or the embodying of the thoughts cease to be a mere separable ornament, and in fact the more does the manner, as we expressed it before, become confluent with the matter. In saying this, we do but vary the form of what we once heard delivered on this subject by Mr. Wordsworth. His remark was by far the weightiest thing we ever heard on the subject of style; and it was this: that it is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction "the dress of thoughts." And what was it then that he would substitute? Why this: he would call it "the *incarnation* of thoughts." Never in one word was so profound a truth conveyed. Mr. Wordsworth was thinking, doubtless, of poetry like his own: viz. that which is eminently meditative. And the truth is apparent on consideration: for, if language were merely a dress, then you could separate the two; you could lay the thoughts on the left hand, the language on the right. But, generally speaking, you can no more deal thus with poetic thoughts than you can with soul and body. The union is too subtle, the intertexture too ineffable,—each co-existing not merely *with* the other, but each *in* and *through* the other. An image, for instance, a single word, often enters into a thought as a constituent part. In short, the two elements are not united as a body with a separable dress, but as a mysterious incarnation.²⁴

It is apparent that the situation in which style and thought are confluent is not directly connected, in De Quincey's mind, with the literature of power. Indeed it is only in one kind of poetry—"meditative" poetry as distinguished from objective poetry, such as Homer's—that confluence exists. Subjectivity of matter (internality and indefiniteness) is the criterion set forth for confluence.

But a critical examination of De Quincey's thought in this passage yields certain criticisms of its adequacy. One may make the charge that he is confusing two different notions

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-230.

of subjectivity. With even more certainty he may be accused of failing to recognize what he does recognize in his other account of style as the incarnation of thought, the existence of three factors in the situation; what we have chosen to call the subject matter or materials (the "something else" to which style is added) here appears to be confused with the thought which is the synthetic and final product. There is every reason why this last confusion should have come about, for where style and thought are separate entities the subject matter is the thought, and it is natural to carry the same terminology over into the present situation. Indeed, were it not that in his other account De Quincey chooses to refer to what we have interpreted to be the subject matter or materials by the term "something else," and to the synthetic product by the term "thought," the designations might easily be reversed, the subject matter being called the "thought" or "thoughts," and the final product the "something else"—the something which is neither matter nor style, but a creation of the two. But let us stay with the earlier terminology, for clarity's sake.

In the first part of the quotation on page 205 subject matter and thought are not so much confused as thought is ignored: the situation is spoken of as though it were still one in which the sole object were to present the matter (which, however, can now only be achieved through style), rather than to create a third thing. But in the last part, where the words "thoughts" and "thought" are both employed, there is inextricable confusion. Before seeking to define the result of this confusion, let us examine the other obscurity we have alleged to exist, that between two different types of subjectivity.

The dominant sense of "subjectivity" in the passage quoted is the one we have already indicated: subjectivity as internality and indefiniteness. Theology, geometry, metaphysics, and the like, De Quincey tells us in the context of the passage, are subjective—in contrast with objective studies like chemistry, physiology, astronomy, and so forth, where abso-

lute, external, facts are dealt with.²⁵ Subjectivity in this sense is a matter of the absence of "external facts, tangible realities, and circumstantial details."

But a different notion of the subjective is suggested by De Quincey's definition of a *quaestio infinita* (so far a question subjective in the first sense) as one in which "everything is . . . finished out of his own [the writer's] peculiar feelings, or his own way of viewing things," in which the problem is "to bring out consciously what yet lurks by involution in many unanalysed feelings." The language here is reminiscent of that of the 1823 definition of power; subjectivity appears to be a matter of *individual feeling*.

Such phrases as we have just quoted are intermingled with others which carry the first concept of subjectivity (as the statement that "any exercise of mind" is subjective in the degree to which it is "connected with what is internal and individual in the sensibilities"); De Quincey appears not to recognize any distinction between the two modes. Yet there must be a distinction, even if subjectivity in the second sense is to be regarded as one particular variety of subjectivity in the first. De Quincey would be prompt to repudiate the idea that philosophical knowledge, for example, is rooted in the "peculiar feelings" of the writer. One recalls his dictum that "one man's mode of knowing an object cannot differ from another man's,"²⁶ and the fact that he believed that in subjective knowledge the objects known are abstract, existing only in the mind, does not alter the situation.

We are now prepared to examine the consequences of these two conclusions to De Quincey's theory of style as the incarnation of thought. De Quincey characterizes simple

²⁵ One is surprised that De Quincey should call geometry a subjective study: it is, to be sure, abstract, and in a sense internal, yet it has as much definiteness or absoluteness as the physical sciences.

²⁶ *Posthumous Works*, I, 304. In "Letters to a Young Man," it may be noted, De Quincey maintains that the first purpose of philosophy is "to rectify the position of the human mind, and to correct its mode of seeing," through bringing to bear on new matter the full effort of an intellect disciplined in logic, mathematics, and language (X, 78 ff.). See also *ibid.*, pp. 23-26, 32-33.

narrative poetry such as Homer's as intensely objective, and as representing, therefore, literature in which style and thought are not confluent. And one understands what he has in mind: the materials of Homer are objective, and this makes a difference for the style. The narrative of Homer, we may say, is more easily translatable than philosophical poetry; the meanings of his words are less closely linked with a unique diction. But De Quincey entirely overlooks the fact that the substance of Homer is more than the narrative data of his poems as rendered intelligible, or even ingratiating, by a style that is separate from those data. The "thought" of Homer—his ultimate theme or effect—is something distinct from his data; and, like the theme or effect of any work of the literature of power, it is subjective both in being an internal thing of the mind and in being a matter of individual feeling. That this theme or effect is largely implicit, arising for the most part out of what seems to be only a narrative of circumstantial detail, may be said to render its communication all the more dependent on style as its very incarnation—on different aspects of style, it may well be, than stand foremost in "meditative" poetry, but yet on style. Pope's Homer is not Homer, and it fails to be so not because Pope's style fails to render intelligible or pleasing the Homeric narrative, but because it fails to incarnate Homer's real "thought" or effect. De Quincey himself asserts that Pope's "deviations from Homer were uniformly the result of imperfect sympathy with the naked simplicity of the antique."²⁷

It would seem that had De Quincey maintained a careful distinction between subject matter and thought, and between the subjectivity of discursive thinking and the subjectivity of individual feeling, he must have arrived at the conclusion that all examples of the literature of power are subjective in thought, and that in every one, therefore, there is a confluence of style and thought. But if such a conclusion is correct, what of the literature in which style as a thing distinct from matter or thought (here thought and matter are themselves identical) is ministerial to the renewal of power?

²⁷ "Alexander Pope," IV, 247.

We have already questioned the propriety of the term "power" as a name for the function of style which is complementary to intelligibility, and suggested the term "ingratiation" in its place. We may now go even further, and question whether even in the literature of practical persuasion, which would surely be for De Quincey a debased form of the literature of power, style can be regarded as separate from thought, that is, from final meaning and effect. It is significant that in the passage we have last considered political argumentation is classified as a kind of speaking or writing in which the view taken is always "*infinita*"—subjective in the sense of internal—and in which, accordingly, the style is inseparable from the thought.

In so far as style and thought do form a unity, it would seem that we would be justified in saying that the function of style (as the function of thought) is either knowledge or power, but that whenever the two are separate, and style is to be thought of in its ministerial aspect, "ingratiation" is the better word to use, alongside of "intelligibility," to describe the functions served. Certainly the substitution of the idea of ingratiation for that of the renewal of power assists us in understanding certain passages in De Quincey which, in their depreciation of style in philosophical writing, appear to conflict sharply with his characterization of philosophy as a subjective discipline of the mind, and one, therefore, in which style is in a large degree the same thing as thought. It will be worth our while to notice specimen passages of this sort. In the essay on Dr. Samuel Parr De Quincey remarks:

. . . Now, one law of good sense is paramount for all composition whatsoever—viz. that the subject, the very ideas, for the development of which only any composition at all became necessary, must not suffer prejudice, or diminution, from any scruples affecting the mere accessories of style or manner. Where both cannot co-exist, perish the style—let the subject-matter (to use a scholastic term) prosper!

This law governs every theme of pure science, or which is capable of a didactic treatment.²⁸

And in the "Letters to a Young Man" he says:

. . . Who thinks or cares about style in such studies [as philosophy] that is sincerely and anxiously in quest of truth? In fact, *style* in any proper sense, is no more a possible thing in such investigations as the understanding is summoned to by Kant than it is in Euclid's *Elements*.²⁹

And yet again in "A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature" we find:

. . . Now, in this department [philosophy], it is evident that the matter altogether transcends the manner. No man will wish to study a profound philosopher but for some previous interest in his doctrines; and, if by any means a man has obtained this, he may pursue this study sufficiently through translations. It is true that neither Sydenham nor Taylor has done justice to Plato, for example, as respects the colloquial graces of his style; but, when the object is purely to pursue a certain course of principles and inferences, the student cannot complain much that he has lost the dramatic beauties of the dialogue, or the luxuriance of the style. These he was not then seeking, by the supposition—what he *did* seek, is still left; whereas in poetry, if the golden apparel is lost, if the music has melted away from the thoughts, all, in fact, is lost. Old Hobbes, or Ogilby, is no more Homer than the score of Mozart's "Don Giovanni" is Mozart's "Don Giovanni."³⁰

The first of these three statements concerns didactic writing—the literature of knowledge—in general; the other two concern philosophy specifically. All appear to stand in flat contradiction to De Quincey's insistence elsewhere on the importance of style as a means of intelligibility, if of nothing else; those which concern philosophy appear to repudiate his view that because philosophy is a subjective study it is peculiarly dependent on style—for the very existence of its ideas. That there is genuine inconsistency cannot be denied; De Quincey has fallen victim to the same "capital oversights" with respect to style that he attributes to the English generally, and he exhibits precisely the same bias of mind. But the inconsistency is much diminished once we recognize that he is not talking about the same thing in these contexts as he is in those with which they conflict; he has in mind a different idea—and doubtless different aspects—of style. Surely it is style as a beautiful thing in itself and style as a means of ingratiation that he here regards as nonessential, perhaps

²⁹ X, 71-72.

³⁰ X, §16.

obstructive or even impossible, in purely didactic writing. This seems clear enough from his references to the stylistic qualities which do exist, but are not indispensable, in Plato: colloquial graces, dramatic beauties of dialogue, general luxuriance.³¹ An idea of style either as a beautiful thing or as an ingratiating one is likely to shrink, where there is a question of obstructing the thought, to an idea of it as mere ornament. We may say, indeed, that there is a general tendency in much of De Quincey's thinking about style, whether as a beautiful thing in itself, an instrumentality, or an embodiment, for his conception to gravitate downward from one which is inclusive—from the idea of style as a general manner of treatment—to an idea of it as a mere affair of diction or language.

It will be remembered from section I of the present chapter that in addition to what De Quincey calls style in the narrow sense—style as mere sentence building—there are two fairly distinct conceptions of style present in his thought, but ordinarily not recognized as distinct: style as the teachable art of selecting suitable words and manipulating effectively words and sentences and the larger units of composition, and style as the manner in which the infinitely various movements of human thought and feeling freely impress themselves upon language. Now that we have reviewed his classification of the functions of style, it is possible to suggest that only the first of these conceptions is involved in the case in which style, as a thing distinct from thought, serves the functions of intelligibility and ingratiation, and that the presence of the second conception characterizes the case in which style and thought are indivisibly joined. Where style is an end in itself, probably both conceptions are involved—at least if the inner logic

³¹ The reference to style in poetry as contrasted with style in philosophy, at the end of this third passage, is somewhat puzzling. De Quincey has been thinking of the style of Plato as a beautiful dress; in speaking of "the golden apparel" of poetry he seemingly retains the same conception. But he proceeds to state that if the poetic apparel is lost, everything is lost—which is inconsistent. He is, however, none too consistent in his use of metaphor, and we would seem to be justified in interpreting this statement about style in poetry as an affirmation that thought and style in poetry are forever inseparable.

of De Quincey's thought rather than the letter of his definitions is followed.

It is a matter of peculiar regret that De Quincey fails ever to touch upon the problem of the coexistence of these cases, for an analysis of it might have led him toward a synthesis of the rival principles of pleasure and power. In the situation in which the style is the thought, if the style is beautiful (and a source of pleasure), the thought must be so too; if the thought communicates power, so also does the style. We noticed in Chapter III the one statement in all De Quincey in which the idea of a synthesis of power and pleasure is broached³²—the statement that the sense of power and the illimitable, incarnated as it were in pleasure, is the true object of the fine arts. De Quincey's thought is paradoxical for the reason that he ordinarily keeps power and pleasure separate, as in his insistence that the intellectual pleasure of style exists apart from the interest of the subject treated. But, as already noted,³³ it is only in degree that his position in this matter differs from that of Wordsworth.

III. VARIETIES OF STYLE

We shall further improve our understanding of De Quincey's theory of style, and in particular of the special case in which style is the very body of thought, if we now examine his opinions on certain varieties of style, in part as exemplified by his judgments on the styles of particular writers. As would be indicated by the fact that we have already had occasion to notice an essential difference between the simple narrative style of Homer and the style of reflective poetry, we shall find ourselves especially concerned with his remarks on the simple and the complex or elaborate styles as contrasted with each other. And we may begin by noting his position with respect to the merits of the Latin or polysyllabic vocabulary as compared to the merits of native words, taking these two elements of the English vocabulary to represent in the simplest

³² See *supra*, pp. 103-105

³³ See *supra*, pp. 145-146.

possible form the opposition between the lofty and the simple styles.

In at least three different contexts De Quincey enters upon a defense of the employment of polysyllabic words, and in two of these he inveighs against the counsel sometimes given in favor of the cultivation and use of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary at the expense of the Latin and Greek. The fullest presentation of his views appears in the essay "On Wordsworth's Poetry," where he criticizes the famous pronouncement in the Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* that the language of ordinary life is the proper diction for poetry. Wordsworth, he declares, really meant no such thing:

... for only a *part* of this diction, according to his own subsequent restriction, was available for such a use. And, secondly, as his own subsequent practice showed, even this part was available only for peculiar classes of poetry. In his own exquisite "Laodamia," in his "Sonnets," in his "Excursion," few are his obligations to the idiomatic language of life, as distinguished from that of books, or of prescriptive usage. Coleridge remarked, justly, that the "Excursion" bristles beyond most poems with what are called "dictionary" words,—that is, polysyllabic words of Latin or Greek origin. And so it must ever be in meditative poetry upon solemn philosophic themes. The gamut of ideas needs a corresponding gamut of expressions; the scale of the thinking which ranges through *every* key exacts, for the artist, an unlimited command over the entire scale of the instrument which he employs. Never, in fact, was there a more erroneous direction—one falser in its grounds, or more ruinous in its tendency—than that given by a modern Rector of the Glasgow University to the students—viz. that they should cultivate the Saxon part of our language rather than the Latin part. Nonsense. Both are indispensable; and, speaking generally, without stopping to distinguish as to subjects, both are *equally* indispensable. Pathos, in situations which are homely, or at all connected with domestic affections, naturally moves by Saxon words. Lyrical emotion of every kind, which (to merit the name *lyrical*) must be in the state of flux and reflux, or, generally, of agitation, also requires the Saxon element of our language. And why? Because the Saxon is the aboriginal element,—the basis, and not the superstructure; consequently it comprehends all the ideas which are natural to the heart of man, and to the *elementary* situations of life. And, although the Latin often furnishes us with duplicates of these ideas, yet the Saxon, or monosyl-

labic part, has the advantage of precedency in our use and knowledge; for it is the language of the NURSERY, whether for rich or poor,—in which great philological academy no toleration is given to words in “osity” or “ation.” There is, therefore, a great advantage, as regards the consecration to our feelings, settled, by usage and custom, upon the Saxon strands in the mixed yarn of our native tongue. And, universally, this may be remarked—that, wherever the passion of a poem is of that sort which *uses*, *presumes*, or *postulates* the ideas, without seeking to extend them, Saxon will be the “cocoon” . . . which the poem spins for itself. But, on the other hand, where the motion of the feeling is *by* and *through* the ideas, where (as in religious or meditative poetry—Young’s, for instance, or Cowper’s) the sentiment creeps and kindles underneath the very tissues of the thinking, there the Latin will predominate; and so much so that, whilst the flesh, the blood, and the muscle, will be often almost exclusively Latin, the articulations or hinges of connexion and transition will be Anglo-Saxon.³⁴

The general principle here enunciated is that of adaptation of the style of vocabulary to the nature of the theme. But what is of particular interest is that the main contrasting situations which call for the simple and the elaborate, or Latin, styles answer to what De Quincey has hitherto described as the objective and the subjective situations. It is poetry that “*uses*, *presumes*, or *postulates*” its ideas, nonreflective poetry, that is, which employs the simple style; it is poetry in which “the motion of the feeling is *by* and *through* the ideas,” where “the sentiment creeps and kindles underneath the very tissues of the thinking,” that requires the elaborate style. Nothing is said here to indicate that either style is better than the other, or that either is more intimately linked than the other with effect or thought (in the technical sense given the word “thought” in the preceding section). But there is a linkage between one kind of style and subjectivity of matter. This is a far more acceptable conclusion than that style itself is inseparably linked with thought only in that poetry in which the basic matter is subjective.

It is implicit in the present quotation that some emotional effects, because they grow out of homely or elementary situations, can be communicated implicitly, without the intervention of reflective statement, and therefore in a simple style;

whereas others, arising out of situations more complex or artificial, must be communicated reflectively, and therefore in a style that answers to the wide range of ideas involved in reflective thought. Themes of the second sort, De Quincey implies, are more solemn, that is, deeper or loftier; it is as though the profoundest feelings can be realized only through the mediation of reflection. If this is so, we might expect him to betray a natural preference for those themes and for the more elaborate style in which they are embodied. And, in spite of a show of impartiality, he does exhibit such a preference.

. . . Neither part of the language [he says in another context] is good or bad absolutely, but in its relation to the subject, and according to the treatment which the subject is meant to receive. It is an error even to say that the Saxon part is more advantageously used for cases of passion. Even that requires further limitation . . . a passion which rises into grandeur, which is complex, elaborate, and interveined with high meditative feelings, would languish or absolutely halt without aid from the Latin moiety of our language.³⁵

Here the principle of relativity of merit is again insisted on, but by denying grandeur to such feelings as can be adequately expressed in the native vocabulary De Quincey seems to suggest the greater value of the Latin style. This suggestion of actual superiority is rendered more definite in yet another place, where it is asserted that "dictionary" words are indispensable to the writer "not only in the proportion by which he transcends other writers as to extent and as to subtlety of thinking, but also as to elevation and sublimity."³⁶

It is an easy step to pass from style as a matter of diction to style as rhythm:

. . . This is a deep subject, with as many faces, or *facets* . . . as a rose-cut diamond; and far be it from me to say one word in praise of those—people of how narrow a sensibility!—who imagine that a simple (that is, according to many tastes, an unelevated and *unrhythmical*) style—take, for instance, an Addisonian or a Swiftian style—is *unconditionally* good. Not so: all depends upon the subject; and there is a style transcending these and all other modes of simplicity* by infinite

³⁵ "The English Language," XIV, 157.

³⁶ "Autobiography," II, 69.

degrees, and in the same proportion impossible to most men: the rhythmical—the continuous—what in French is called the *soutenu*; which to humbler styles stands in the relation of an organ to a shepherd's pipe. This also finds its justification in its subject; and the subject which *can* justify it must be of a corresponding quality—loftier, and, therefore, rare.³⁷

From this it is unmistakable that De Quincey regards the rhythmical or elaborate style as transcending all others. And it is apparent that in doing so he is thinking of it as a style which is more beautiful in itself.

It may be said that De Quincey's positive preference for the elaborate style is reënforced by his prejudices against the greatest writers of the eighteenth century, which leads him to depreciate the character of their style. Swift's style, he tells us, has the merit of "*vernacularity*, and nothing better or finer." Furthermore, Swift wrote this style "in common with multitudes besides of that age." Defoe wrote it, and so did many religious writers.

. . . And what wonder should there be in this, when the main qualification for such a style was plain good sense, natural feeling, unpretendingness, some little scholarly practice in putting together the clockwork of sentences so as to avoid mechanical awkwardness of construction, but above all the advantage of a *subject* such in its nature as instinctively to reject ornament, lest it should draw off attention from itself? Such subjects are common; but grand impassioned subjects insist upon a different treatment; and *there* it is that the true difficulties of style commence; and there it is that your worshipful Master Jonathan would have broke down irrecoverably.

. . . suppose the case that the Dean had been required to write a pendant for Sir Walter Raleigh's immortal apostrophe to Death, or to many passages that I could select in Sir Thomas Browne's "*Religio Medici*" and his "*Urn-Burial*," or to Jeremy Taylor's inaugural sections of his "*Holy Living and Dying*," do you know what would have happened? Are you aware what sort of ridiculous figure your poor bald Jonathan would have cut? About the same that would be cut by a forlorn scullion from a greasy eating-house at Rotterdam, if suddenly called away in vision to act as seneschal to the festival of Belshazzar the king before a thousand of his lords.³⁸

Such is De Quincey's opinion of the simple style: it is one in which the true difficulties of style have not commenced.

³⁷ "Recollections of Charles Lamb," III, 51.

³⁸ "Schlosser's Literary History: On Swift," XI, 17-18.

Lamb also was a practitioner of the plain style, so far as rhythm and sweep of feeling are concerned. Lamb "shrank from the continuous, from the sustained, from the elaborate." And though De Quincey's attitude toward him is of course more appreciative, yet a criticism is implied that is not made of the eighteenth-century prose writers, namely that his subject matter and feeling were such as could have profited by incorporation in the elaborate style—at least on certain occasions.

The elaborate indeed, without which much truth and beauty must perish in germ, was by name the object of his invectives. The instances are many, in his own beautiful essays, where he literally collapses, literally sinks away from openings suddenly offering themselves to flights of pathos or solemnity in direct prosecution of his own theme The least observing reader of *Elia* cannot have failed to notice that the most felicitous passages always accomplish their circuit in a few sentences. The gyration within which his sentiment wheels, no matter of what kind it may be, is always the shortest possible. It does not prolong itself—it does not repeat itself—it does not propagate itself.³⁹

Here is a clear suggestion that Lamb's stylistic failure on certain occasions was equivalent to a failure to realize his theme: potential thought failed to become incarnate. And yet though the longer gyrations would have been at once gyrations of thought or sentiment and of rhythms of words, it is apparent that De Quincey views the rhythmic patterns, openings for which were offered, as capable of consideration by themselves. It is not alone truth that perishes without the elaborate, but also beauty.

The sense of music, avers De Quincey, "was utterly obliterated, as with a sponge, by nature herself from Lamb's organization."

. . . . It was a corollary . . . that Lamb had no sense of the rhythmical in prose composition. Rhythmus, or pomp of cadence, or sonorous ascent of clauses, in the structure of sentences, were effects of art as much thrown away upon *him* as the voice of the charmer upon the deaf adder. We ourselves, occupying the very station of polar opposition to that of Lamb,—being as morbidly, perhaps, in the one excess as he in the other,—naturally detected this omission in Lamb's nature at an early stage of our acquaintance.⁴⁰

³⁹ "Charles Lamb," V, 234.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

De Quincey "shrieked with . . . an anguish of recoil" from certain sentences "in which Lamb perceived no fault at all." Here the emphasis is on rhythm as a thing beautiful in itself, and evidence is afforded that De Quincey does indeed view the situation in which style is an end per se as capable of coexisting with that in which it must be regarded as the incarnation of thought.

It is perhaps but natural that the elaborate style should be richer than the simple style in the kind of beauty which can be regarded as a separate thing from thought—in beauty of design, shall we say, as distinguished from beauty of organic function. And it is beauty of design (intellectual design and sensuous design) that De Quincey always has primarily in mind. But except for such literature as may exist solely for the free display of style, he adheres to the requirement that stylistic display shall be confined to situations in which it is ministerial to a desired effect of thought, or in which it is the very incarnation of thought.

Hazlitt's style, like Lamb's, is characterized as discontinuous, as lacking in eloquence:

. . . The very reason for Hazlitt's defect in eloquence as a lecturer is sufficient also as a reason why he could not have been a comprehensive thinker Hazlitt was not eloquent, because he was discontinuous. No man can be eloquent whose thoughts are abrupt, insulated, capricious, and (to borrow an impressive word from Coleridge) non-sequacious. Eloquence resides not in separate or fractional ideas, but in the relations of manifold ideas, and in the mode of their evolution from each other. It is not indeed enough that the ideas should be many, and their relations coherent; the main condition lies in the *key* of the evolution, in the *law* of the succession. The elements are nothing without the atmosphere that moulds, and the dynamic forces that combine. Now Hazlitt's brilliancy is seen chiefly in separate splinterings of phrase or image which throw upon the eye a vitreous scintillation for a moment, but spread no deep suffusions of colour, and distribute no masses of mighty shadow. A flash, a solitary flash, and all is gone Hazlitt's thoughts were of the same fractured and discontinuous order as his illustrative images—seldom or never self-diffusive; and *that* is a sufficient argument that he had never cultivated philosophic thinking.⁴¹

No better illustration could be found of the application of the principle of style as the incarnation of thought than this criticism of Hazlitt's defects in style as related to his defects as a thinker.

We now leave the subject of the simple style as opposed to the elaborate and proceed to the problem of the relation of style to the special characteristics of the writer's mind. We have, of course, touched upon that problem already in connection with Lamb and Hazlitt, but the main emphasis has been upon style as related to the subject. So far, style as affected by the peculiar constitution of the writer's mind has been viewed only in terms of the defects that ensue from a writer's deficiencies in taste or in power as a thinker. But what of positive differences in style resulting from differences in individuality of mind?

It was stated in section I of this chapter that the concept of style as the sum of the idiosyncrasies of a particular writer, growing out of the peculiar accidents of his temperament and experience, is one which, in so far as it enters into De Quincey's thought at all, enters only as a concept of something present in literature a small part of the time. We are now ready to support this statement by an examination of the one context in which De Quincey refers to style as a function of what may be called personality. The passage is again one in which Lamb's style is under consideration.

Everywhere, indeed, in the writings of Lamb, and not merely in his *Elia*, the character of the writer co-operates in an under-current to the effect of the thing written. To understand, in the fullest sense, either the gaiety or the tenderness of a particular passage, you must have some insight into the particular bias of the writer's mind, whether native and original, or impressed gradually by the accidents of situation; whether simply developed out of predispositions by the action of life, or violently scorched into the constitution by some fierce fever of calamity. There is in modern literature a whole class of writers, though not a large one, standing within the same category: some marked originality of character in the writer becomes a co-efficient with what he says to a common result; you must sympathise with this *personality* in the author before you can appreciate the most significant parts of his views. In most books the writer figures as a mere abstraction, without sex or age or local station, whom the reader banishes from his thoughts.

What is written seems to proceed from a blank intellect, not from a man clothed with fleshly peculiarities and differences. These peculiarities and differences neither do, nor (generally speaking) *could* intermingle with the texture of the thoughts, so as to modify their force or their direction. In such books,—and they form the vast majority,—there is nothing to be found or to be looked for beyond the direct objective. (*Sit venia verbo!*) But, in a small section of books, the objective in the thought becomes confluent with the subjective in the thinker—the two forces unite for a joint product; and, fully to enjoy the product, or fully to apprehend either element, both must be known. It is singular, and worth inquiring into, for the reason that the Greek and Roman literature had no such books . . . perhaps we may pronounce Rabelais and Montaigne the earliest of writers in the class described. In the century following *theirs* came Sir Thomas Browne, and immediately after *him* La Fontaine. Then came Swift, Sterne, with others less distinguished: in Germany, Hippel, the friend of Kant, Harmann the obscure, and the greatest of the whole body—John Paul Fr. Richter. In *him*, from the strength and determinateness of his nature, as well as from the great extent of his writing, the philosophy of this interaction between the author as a human agency and his theme as an intellectual re-agency might best be studied. From *him* might be derived the largest number of cases illustrating boldly this absorption of the universal into the concrete—of the pure intellect into the human nature of the author. But nowhere could illustrations be found more interesting . . . than in the better parts of Lamb.⁴²

This is a revelatory passage, exhibiting conclusively the fact that De Quincey habitually regards most literature as an impersonal thing. One grants of course that in the authors he names as belonging to the special class the sense of personality is much more consciously present for the reader; but it is astonishing at first to read his statement that “in most books the writer figures as a mere abstraction . . . whom the reader banishes from his thoughts,” that what is written “seems to proceed from a blank intellect,” that the peculiarities of a writer “neither do, nor (generally speaking) *could* intermingle with the texture of the thoughts, so as to modify their force or their direction”—his denial that in most writing there is an interaction between the author as a human agency and his theme. For this is a denial not only that style is usually a function of personality but also that the conception of the theme itself is such. We have said

⁴² “Charles Lamb,” V, 217–218.

that De Quincey occupies an advanced position for his day with respect to the theory that literature is an organic product. But his view of literature as organic stops short with the factor of the national society or the period of social development within which a writer finds himself; it does not extend to the idea of the writer himself as an individual whose thoughts and feelings are uniquely determined by his special heredity and environment—except for a small class of writers in whose work the personal element is so obtrusive that it cannot be ignored. And this is, from one point of view, surprising, inasmuch as it is characteristic of romantic thought to emphasize the writer as an individual. It is not, however, this phase of romanticism of which De Quincey, in his capacity of critic, is an exemplar.

De Quincey's insistence on the impersonality of the writer is, after all, consistent for the most part with his general approach to literature. We have seen that he concerns himself almost not at all with the concept of expression as distinguished from communication or with the problem of the motivation of the writer. He has little to say about the creative faculty or process. In his thought about literature he is primarily concerned with the nature and value of final effects, and much of the time he tends to assume these effects as things given. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he should ordinarily think of style, which is the embodiment of such effects, as also a thing given—in the sense that certain modes of style exist objectively, and that from these the writer chooses such a style as he can command and as is adapted to his theme.

But is there not a hidden difficulty in all this? For De Quincey does view genius as unique. And every work of literature is unique in that it involves unique combinations of thoughts and feelings. The only explanation would seem to be that he regards these various aspects of uniqueness as coming into being only in the moment of creation—as arising more or less by chance out of the immediate play of thought and feeling as brought into relation to certain fixed capacities in the writer. The pattern of capacities repre-

sents, shall we say, an individuation of "pure intellect," but not a coloration of it by human personality in De Quincey's sense of the term.

It is individuation of intellectual constitution that is illustrated in De Quincey's analysis of the contrast between the style of Burke and that of Johnson—an analysis that exhibits his critical insight at its best:

... For one moment, reader, pause upon the spectacle of two contrasted intellects, Burke's and Johnson's: one an intellect essentially going forward, governed by the very necessity of growth, by the law of motion in advance; the latter essentially an intellect retrogressive, retrospective, and throwing itself back on its own steps. This original difference was aided accidentally in Burke by the tendencies of political partisanship,—which, both from moving amongst moving things and uncertainties, as compared with the more stationary aspects of moral philosophy, and also from its more fluctuating and fiery passions, must unavoidably reflect in greater life the tumultuary character of conversation. The result from these original differences of intellectual constitution, aided by these secondary differences of pursuit, is, that Dr. Johnson never, in any instance, grows a truth before your eyes whilst in the act of delivering it or moving towards it. All that he offers up to the end of the chapter he had when he began. But to Burke, such was the prodigious elasticity of his thinking, equally in his conversation and in his writings, the mere act of movement became the principle or cause of movement. Motion propagated motion, and life threw off life. The very violence of a projectile as thrown by *him* caused it to rebound in fresh forms, fresh angles, splintering, coruscating, which gave out thoughts as new (and as startling) to himself as they are to his reader. In this power, which might be illustrated largely from the writings of Burke, is seen something allied to the powers of a prophetic seer, who is compelled oftentimes into seeing things as unexpected by himself as by others.⁴³

Johnson's powers of conversation, says De Quincey, were narrow in compass, however strong within their limits. Johnson demanded a subject teeming with elements of known contradictory opinion; his views of all things tended to negation. Hence may be explained the fact that "the gyration of his flight upon any one question that ever came before him was so exceedingly brief":

⁴³ "Rhetoric," X, 269-270.

. . . There was no process, no evolution, no movement of self-conflict or preparation: a word, a distinction, a pointed antithesis, and, above all, a new abstraction of the logic involved in some popular fallacy, or doubt or prejudice, or problem, formed the utmost of his efforts.⁴⁴

Elsewhere De Quincey returns to the same comparison. In his "Appended Notes" to the paper on Dr. Samuel Parr he asserts that the styles of Johnson and Burke correspond respectively to two theories of generation:

. . . one (Johnson's) to the theory of *Preformation* (or Evolution), where all the future products, down to the very last, lie secretly wrapped up in the original germ,—consequently nothing is positively added, everything is simply unveiled; the other (Burke's) to the theory of *Epigenesis*, where each stage of the growth becomes a causative impulse to a new stage,—every separate element in the mysterious process of generation being, on this hypothesis, an absolute supervention of new matter, and not a mere uncovering of old, already involved at starting in the primary germ.⁴⁵

No account of the contrast between the mental movements of Burke and Johnson could be more penetrating, but the individual differences as De Quincey analyzes them are not really differences of human personality as he has used that term. One does not need to sympathize with the peculiar bias of Burke's mind, or of Johnson's, in order to appreciate the most significant part of what the one writer or the other has to say; one does not need to concern oneself with the interaction "between the author as a human agency and his theme as an intellectual re-agency"—or if one does he does so in contravention of De Quincey's view of the matter. The differences between Burke and Johnson as De Quincey describes them are hardly the product of uniquely individual endowments or experiences; they are rather differences between types of intellectual equipment and habit.

IV. DE QUINCEY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE THEORY OF STYLE

Renton, in his *The Logic of Style* asserts that the appearance of De Quincey constitutes "the second momentum in the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

⁴⁵ V, 134. See also "Rhetoric," X, 125 n.

history of Style," the first momentum being that supplied by Aristotle.⁴⁶ It would seem that he must have in mind De Quincey's promulgation of the idea of style as the incarnation of thought.

The result of our study has been to show that De Quincey's conscious application of this idea is limited, on the whole, to literature in which the matter dealt with is "subjective" in a special sense—of the nature of abstract thought unguided by determinate data from without the mind—although his concept of subjectivity is not without ambiguity and at moments appears to involve individuality of feeling. The significance of the employment of this special sense of subjectivity as a criterion of the existence of a special relationship between style and matter can hardly be denied. Style unquestionably plays a more critical rôle in the communication of "internal" subject matter than it does in that of matter which is relatively external to the mind. It may, however, be questioned whether the relationship is one which approximates identity of style and thought unless subjectivity of individual feeling is also present, unless the writer's attitude toward his matter is other than purely neutral.

In any event, it would appear that De Quincey is commonly given credit for a generalization concerning style more comprehensive than the one which is fully present in his mind, for the principle ordinarily attributed to him is that of the inseparability of style and thought in literature as a fine art generally. Thus Miss Darbishire, after quoting the definition of style as the incarnation of thought, asserts that De Quincey is "the first of English critics to support consistently, both in precept and in practice, the theory that in literature, as in all the arts, substance and form are inseparable."⁴⁷ She is inaccurate both as to the range of De Quincey's application of the principle and as to the matter of his consistency—for certainly his insistence on the value and beauty

⁴⁶ William Renton, *The Logic of Style; Being an Introduction to Critical Science* (London, 1874), p. 11.

⁴⁷ *De Quincey's Literary Criticism*, edited by H. Darbishire (London, 1909), p. 31.

of style as a thing in itself, judged apart from interest of subject matter, is in conflict with the notion that in literature proper style and matter cannot be separated.

We have seen that De Quincey himself acknowledges his indebtedness to Wordsworth for the conception of the confluence of style and thought. Wordsworth's conception as a matter of fact, appears to be wider than De Quincey's—to be coextensive with the one commonly attributed to De Quincey. But the conception of style and thought as bearing the same relationship to each other as body and soul is far older than Wordsworth. "Ben Jonson said all this three centuries ago: 'In all we call speech, words, and sense are as the body and soul.'"⁴⁸ And Campbell employs the same analogy: "Thus, language and thought, like body and soul, are made to correspond, and the qualities of the one exactly to co-operate with those of the other."⁴⁹

There is, of course, no question of originality in regard to the idea that style is a beautiful thing in itself. That conception may be described as a common one before the full emergence of the organic principle. We have seen that Wordsworth, in discussing poetic meter, adheres to a theory of the pure pleasurableness of style. And Campbell again is in agreement:

But though the perfection of the body consists . . . in its fitness for serving the purposes of the soul, it is, at the same time, capable of one peculiar excellence as a visible [sensuous] object. The excellence I mean is *beauty*, which evidently implies more than what results from the fitness of the several organs and members for answering their respective ends. That there is a beauty in the perceived fitness of means to their end, and instruments to their use, is uncontrovertible. All that I contend for here is, that this is not the whole of what is implied in the term *beauty* . . . there is an excellence of which language is susceptible as an audible object, distinct from its aptitude for conveying the sentiments of the orator with light and energy⁵⁰ into the minds of the hearers. Now as *music* is to the ear what *beauty* is to the eye, I shall,

⁴⁸ Quoted by Philo M. Buck, Jr., *Literary Criticism: A Study of Values in Literature* (New York and London, 1930), p. 80.

⁴⁹ George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York, 1859), p. 238.

⁵⁰ Here, too, in his definition of the ministerial functions served by style, Campbell parallels De Quincey.

for want of a more proper term, denominate this excellence in style its music, though I acknowledge the word is rarely used with so great latitude.⁵¹

It is true that, apart from the beauty of utility, it is the purely sensuous beauty of style of which Campbell speaks and that De Quincey's concept of stylistic beauty is a more extended one, comprehending a harmony of logical relations, a counterpoint of effects.⁵²

It is, nonetheless, impossible to credit De Quincey with much originality in his theory of style—although his criterion of subjectivity for the case in which style and matter are confluent does appear to be original, and has, as already suggested, a real value. His theory would have been greatly advanced had he brought his speculations on style into direct relation with those on knowledge versus power in literature, for this would have forced him into a more careful discrimination between the various senses of the word, would probably have led to a full and clear enunciation of the principle commonly credited to him, and might have resulted—though this is less certain—in a more adequate view of the relation of style to the individual writer and an abandonment of the traditional notion of the "kinds" of style. Finally, it might have led him to a direct recognition of the conflict between the rival ideas of pleasure and power, and thus to the establishment of a more organic view.

De Quincey's theory of style is a curious mixture of the traditional and the prophetic, and its crowning paradox is

⁵¹ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁵² Pater's view of the beauty of style appears to be in some respects an elaboration of De Quincey's, but is more satisfactory in that it distinguishes between "the many contingent and removable beauties with which beautiful style may charm us, but which it can exist without" and "that perfect justice . . . omnipresent in good work, in function at every point, from single epithets to the rhythm of a whole book, . . . [in which lies] the specific, indispensable, very intellectual, beauty of literature, the possibility of which constitutes it a fine art" ("Essay on Style," in *Appreciations* [Library ed.; London, 1910], p. 30). Pater, of course, places the emphasis on functional beauty. De Quincey's idea of pattern in style as an end in itself is developed by R. L. Stevenson.

its simultaneous emphasis upon the value of style as a beautiful thing per se and upon the indissoluble relationship between style and thought. But, despite its limitations, his theory is rich in suggestion, and its influence, though probably based in part upon a mistaken interpretation, has been not the less great for that reason.

CHAPTER VI

Literature as Manipulation: Rhetoric

I. THE NATURE OF RHETORIC

AN EXAMINATION of De Quincey's theory of rhetoric is important in itself, inasmuch as his "Rhetoric" is one of his major critical pieces and perhaps the most original contribution of modern times to speculation on the subject; but it is of the highest importance also for the light which it can throw both upon the paradox in his theory of literature and upon the peculiar character of his critical writings generally. For it is in the "Rhetoric" that De Quincey most fully develops the point of view that stands in marked contrast to the doctrine of literature as power, and an understanding of his idea of rhetoric is the best key to an interpretation of his accomplishment and his limitations as a critic.

De Quincey's pronouncements on rhetoric are less scattered than those on other subjects, falling mainly, though not entirely, within the "Rhetoric" itself. A piece of some twenty thousand words, this essay appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in December, 1828, as an excursive review of the then new *Elements of Rhetoric* by Richard Whately. Except for one incidental reference, it makes no mention of Whately's work until the closing pages, where is to be found a rather desultory examination of some of the merits and defects of the book. The essay divides itself into two distinct parts, the first and shorter of which consists of a preliminary analysis of the nature of rhetoric, the second, of a survey—remarkably ambitious in scope, however superficial in various places—of the literature of rhetoric from the time of the Greeks to De Quincey's own day.

The essay opens with the statement that "No art cultivated by man has suffered more in the revolutions of taste and opinion than the art of Rhetoric." The word once "designated the whole cycle of accomplishments which prepared a man for public affairs," but,

. . . From that height it has descended to a level with the arts of alchemy and astrology, as holding out promises which consist in a mixed degree of impostures wherever its pretensions happened to be weighty, and of trifles wherever they happened to be true. If we look into the prevailing theory of Rhetoric, under which it meets with so degrading an estimate, we shall find that it fluctuates between two different conceptions, according to one of which it is an art of ostentatious ornament, and according to the other an art of sophistry.¹

Under the view, De Quincey continues, that a man plays the part of the rhetorician "when he treats a subject with more than usual gaiety of ornament," particularly conscious ornament, what rhetoric accomplishes "is not so much to persuade as to delight . . . to stimulate the attention and captivate the taste." This view is based on "something separable and accidental in the *manner*." The second view "lays its foundation in something essential to the *matter*"; argument of some quality must be taken as its operative principle.

Here then we have in popular use two separate ideas of Rhetoric: one of which is occupied with the general end of the fine arts—that is to say, intellectual pleasure; the other applies itself more specifically to a definite purpose of utility, viz. fraud.

Such is the popular idea of Rhetoric; which wants both unity and precision.²

We might expect that De Quincey would proceed by analyzing whatever element of truth is contained within each of the two popular ideas of rhetoric in order to show how these elements can be combined into a single—and presumably a less degrading—view. But his thought takes quite another tack. The formal teachers of rhetoric, he tells us, fail to be of much assistance in clarifying the idea of rhetoric, for though all of them agree that rhetoric may be defined as the art of persuasion, they are vague or even contradictory when it comes to a definition of persuasion.

¹ X, 81.

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

... To waive a thousand of others, Dr. Whately, in the work before us, insists upon the *conviction* of the understanding as "an essential part of the persuasion"; and, on the other hand, the author of the *Philosophy of Rhetoric* [Campbell]³ is equally satisfied that there is no persuasion without an appeal to the *passions*. Here are two views. We, for our parts, have a third which excludes both. Where conviction begins, the field of Rhetoric ends; that is our opinion: and, as to the passions, we contend that they are not within the province of Rhetoric, but of Eloquence.⁴

Thus abruptly does De Quincey prepare the way for the development of his own theory of rhetoric—by excluding from rhetoric both of the elements commonly regarded as essential to the persuasive process. It would appear, however, that he accepts the definition of rhetoric as persuasion.⁵

In this view of Rhetoric and its functions [he continues] we coincide with Aristotle; as indeed originally we took it up on a suggestion derived from him

Many years ago, when studying the Aristotelian Rhetoric at Oxford, it struck us that, by whatever name Aristotle might describe the main purpose of Rhetoric, practically, at least, in his own treatment of it, he threw the whole stress upon finding such arguments for any given thesis

³ It will be a convenience for the reader to recall that George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* was first published in 1776 and that Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* first appeared in 1828.

⁴ "Rhetoric," X, 82. De Quincey surely exaggerates any opposition that may exist between Whately and Campbell. It is true that Whately emphasizes the element of conviction, and Campbell the element of the appeal to the feelings; but both writers regard both elements as essential. Whately says specifically that Campbell is right in declaring there can be no persuasion without appeal to the passions, "if under the term Passion is included every active principle of our nature" (*Elements of Rhetoric* [Boston, 1852], p. 120). He further states that reason alone can no more influence the will and operate as a motive "than the eyes, which shew a man his road, can enable him to move from place to place" (*ibid.*, p. 122). As for Campbell, he asserts that "to convince the hearers is always either proposed by the orator as his end in addressing them, or supposed to accompany the accomplishment of his end" (*The Philosophy of Rhetoric* [New York, 1859], p. 55).

⁵ It is curious that De Quincey does not point out the relation of this definition to the two popular conceptions of rhetoric. Had he done so, it would seem that he would have had to recognize the idea of sophistry as a corruption or degradation of the idea of persuasion. If he had arrived at such a recognition, and if indeed he does accept the definition of rhetoric as persuasion, he would have been making a choice between the popular views, in the sense of taking the one of them rather than the other as corresponding (however imperfectly) to the true view.

as, without positively proving or disproving it, should give it a colourable support. It could not be by accident that the topics, or general heads of argument, were never in an absolute and unconditional sense true, but contained so much of plausible or colourable truth as is expressed in the original meaning of the word *probable*. A *ratio probabilis*, in the Latin use of the word *probabilis*, is that ground of assent—not which the understanding can solemnly approve and abide by—but the very opposite to this; one which it can submit to for a moment, and countenance as within the limits of the plausible. That this was the real governing law of Aristotle's procedure it was not possible to doubt: but was it consciously known to himself? If so, how was it to be reconciled with his own formal account of the office of Rhetoric, so often repeated, that it consisted in finding enthymemes? What then was an Enthymeme?⁶

De Quincey proceeds to relate the finding of enthymemes to the idea of reasoning which is merely plausible, by challenging the commonly accepted definition of the enthymeme as a syllogism in which one of the propositions is suppressed. What possible relation, he asks, has such a definition to rhetoric?

... Nature sufficiently prompts all men to that sort of ellipsis; and what impertinence in a teacher to build his whole system upon a solemn precept to do this or that, when the rack would not have forced any man to do otherwise! Besides, Aristotle had represented it as the fault of former systems that they applied themselves exclusively to the treatment of the passions—an object foreign to the purpose of the rhetorician, who, in some situations, is absolutely forbidden by law to use any such arts: whereas, says he, his true and universal weapon is the enthymeme, which is open to him everywhere. Now, what opposition, or what relation of any kind, can be imagined between the system which he rejects and the one he adopts, if the enthymeme is to be understood as it usually has been? The rhetorician is not to address the passions, but—what? to mind that in all his arguments he suppresses one of his propositions! And these follies are put into the mouth of Aristotle!⁷

. As authority for the view that by the enthymeme Aristotle does not mean merely a truncated syllogism, De Quincey cites the eighteenth-century Italian lexicographer Facciolati, whose essay *De Enthymemate* had been brought to his attention by his friend Sir William Hamilton.⁸ He gives, in a

⁶ "Rhetoric," X, 83–86.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

⁸ The acknowledgment to Sir William is made not only here but also in

footnote, a digest of Facciolati's arguments, which hardly merit reproduction here. What is essential is the new definition of the enthymeme that emerges from these arguments, and which De Quincey accepts and promulgates:

... An enthymeme differs from a syllogism, not in the accident of suppressing one of its propositions; either may do this, or neither; the difference is essential, and in the nature of the *matter*: that of the syllogism proper being certain and apodeictic; that of the enthymeme simply probable, and drawn from the province of opinion.

This theory tallies exactly with our own previous construction of Aristotle's Rhetoric, and explains the stress which he had laid at the outset upon enthymemes. Whatsoever is certain, or matter of fixed science, can be no subject for the rhetorician: where it is possible for the understanding to be convinced, no field is open for rhetorical persuasion. Absolute certainty and fixed science transcend opinion, and exclude the probable. The province of Rhetoric, whether meant for an influence upon the actions, or simply upon the belief, lies amongst that vast field of cases where there is a *pro* and a *con*, with the chance of right and wrong, true and false, distributed in varying proportions between them. There is also an immense range of truths where there are no chances at all concerned, but the affirmative and the negative are both true: as, for example, the goodness of human nature and its wickedness; the happiness of human life and its misery; the charms of

the long essay that has his name as title (1852). See V, 339-340. It is interesting to compare Sir William's summary of the situation with De Quincey's and to note his allusion to the latter's treatment of the subject in the "Rhetoric": "But if the distinction [between the syllogism with all propositions present and the enthymeme as a syllogism with one proposition missing], in its general nature, be unphilosophical, it is still more irrational at the hands of its reputed author. For Aristotle distinguishes the enthymeme from the mere syllogism, as a reasoning of a peculiar *matter*,—from *signs* and *likelihoods*; so that, if he over-and-above discriminated these by an accident of *form*, he would divide the genus by *two differences*, and differences of a merely *contingent association*. Yet, strange to say, this improbability has been believed;—believed without any cogent evidence;—believed from the most ancient times; and even when the opinion was at last competently refuted, the refutation was itself so immediately forgotten, that there seems not to be at present a logical author (not to say in England, but) in Europe, who is even aware of the existence of the controversy*" (*Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform* [3d ed.; Edinburgh and London, 1866], p. 152).

Hamilton's note, to which the asterisk refers, is as follows: "In this country, some years ago, the question was stated in a popular miscellany, with his usual ability, by a learned friend to whom we pointed out the evidence; but none of the subsequent writers have profited by the information" (*ibid.*).

knowledge, and its hollowness; the fragility of human prosperity in the eye of religious meditation, and its security as estimated by worldly confidence and youthful hope. In all such cases the rhetorician exhibits his art by giving an impulse to one side, and by withdrawing the mind so steadily from all thoughts or images which support the other as to leave it practically under the possession of a one-sided estimate.⁹

Here, finally, we have a positive statement of De Quincey's own view, which he sets forth as a true interpretation of Aristotle. Rhetoric is indeed an art of persuasion, but its subject matter is limited to the province of doubtful truth and half-truth.¹⁰ It is, furthermore, a purely intellectual form of persuasion, any appeal to the feelings being excluded. De Quincey does not focus attention upon the ultimate aim of this rhetorical persuasion, but by his reference to the alternative possibilities of "an influence upon the actions, or simply upon the belief," he implies that the aim may be either practical or nonpractical. In either case, rhetoric is an art of affecting beliefs, and it proceeds by the selective presentation of such ideas as will induce one belief rather than another.

The ethical problem involved in such a view of rhetoric is not discussed, at this place or at any other in the essay. As to why it is not we shall be able to hazard a guess later on. But it is difficult to see how, in terms of De Quincey's thesis, sophistry or fraud can be eliminated from rhetoric. For so long as rhetoric presents only a one-sided estimate of a subject, the possibility of fraud is surely present whenever the aim is that of influencing action. The most that can be said on the other side is that De Quincey's definition, by excluding from the field of rhetoric all subject matter where absolute certainty is possible, excludes the actual misrepresentation of fixed truth.

We postpone the further exploration of the implications

⁹ "Rhetoric," X, 90-91.

¹⁰ It is now evident that by "conviction," a thing he has excluded from rhetoric, De Quincey means the establishment of belief by a process of absolute demonstration or logical proof. By the tacit assumption of such a definition he artificially widens the difference between his own view and Whately's. Whately regards conviction as the establishment of belief by argumentation—and recognizes both "moral or probable" arguments and "demonstrative or necessary" ones (see Whately, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-43).

of De Quincey's limitation of rhetoric to the field of opinion or partial truth and turn to the question of the acceptability of the claim that his view of rhetoric coincides with that of Aristotle. Masson justly points out in a footnote that De Quincey is "wrong, utterly wrong, in the statement that Aristotle excluded from his Rhetoric all appeal to the passions"; that the "PATHETIC PISTIS, or that means of persuasion to which an orator might help himself by powerful playing upon the feelings of his audience, was distinctly recognised by Aristotle and discussed by him at large."¹¹ It is, indeed, astonishing that De Quincey should be able to overlook Aristotle's detailed treatment of pathetic proof; such a lapse can only be explained by combining the general suggestion of Masson that the opening portion of the "Rhetoric" seems to imply an imperfect recollection of Aristotle with the idea that, bent for his own reasons on excluding from rhetoric any appeal to the emotions, De Quincey exercises a rhetorician's prerogative of withdrawing the mind from such evidence as is inconsistent with the position he is interested in building up.

But what of De Quincey's interpretation of the Aristotelian enthymeme? Certainly the case which he and the writers who are his sources present is an impressive one, and appears to accord with a careful reading of Aristotle. It is of great interest that Dr. McBurney, the most recent investigator of the problem, arrives at the same interpretation as does De Quincey. He states that Aristotle "very clearly identifies the enthymeme with probable matter as distinguished from that of the syllogism proper, which he considers to be certain and apodeictic."¹² Dr. McBurney, moreover, stands with

¹¹ Editor's footnote, *Collected Writings*, X, 87. Whately gives a fair account of the case when he says, "Aristotle, and many other writers, have spoken of appeals to the Passions as an unfair mode of influencing the hearers But Aristotle by no means overlooked the necessity with a view to Persuasion, properly so termed, of calling into action some motive that may influence the Will; it is plain that whenever he speaks with reprobation of an appeal to the Passions, his meaning is, the excitement of such feelings as ought not to influence the decision of the question in hand . . ." (*op. cit.*, pp. 119-120).

¹² James H. McBurney, "Some Recent Interpretations of the Aristotelian Enthymeme," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters*, XXI (1935), 491. 1936.

De Quincey in his opinion of the central importance of the enthymeme in Aristotle's theory, affirming that for Aristotle the enthymeme is, indeed, the "element" or "unit" of persuasive speech.¹³

As examined thus far, De Quincey's theory of rhetoric, except for its exclusion of all appeals to the feelings, may be said to resemble the Aristotelian view closely, if not indeed to constitute a corrected interpretation of that view.

Having defined the proper subject matter of rhetoric and the kind of treatment given to this subject matter, De Quincey next turns his attention to the problem of style, and is led to discuss further in connection with it the question of the feelings and to formulate another general definition of rhetoric:

Upon this theory, what relation to Rhetoric shall we assign to style and the ornamental arts of composition? In some respects they seem liable to the same objection as that which Aristotle has urged against appeals to the passions. Both are extra-essential . . . they are subjective arts, not objective; that is, they do not affect the thing which is to be surveyed, but the eye of him who is to survey. Yet, at a banquet, the epicure holds himself not more obliged to the cook for the venison than to the physician who braces his stomach to enjoy. And any arts which conciliate regard to the speaker indirectly promote the effect of his arguments. On this account, and because (under the severest limitation of Rhetoric) they are in many cases indispensable to the perfect interpretation of the thoughts, we may admit arts of style and ornamental composition as the ministerial part of Rhetoric. But with regard to the passions . . . it is a sufficient answer that they are already preoccupied by what is called *Eloquence*.

. . . By Eloquence we understand the overflow of powerful feelings upon occasions fitted to excite them. But Rhetoric is the art of aggrandizing and bringing out into strong relief, by means of various and striking thoughts, some aspect of truth which of itself is supported by no spontaneous feelings, and therefore rests upon artificial aids.¹⁴

And here the first or strictly definitive part of the essay ends.

It is obvious that in defining style as the ministerial part of rhetoric, De Quincey is resisting that popular conception

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 495. McBurney differs in this from Masson, who asserts that De Quincey exaggerates the importance assigned by Aristotle to the enthymeme.

¹⁴ "Rhetoric," X, 92.

described at the beginning of the essay according to which rhetoric is an art of style, serving the end of intellectual pleasure. He is, moreover, failing to advance the claims for style as an end per se which he himself makes elsewhere. At this point we might suppose that such a denial of the value of style as a thing in itself in rhetorical writing indicates a preoccupation with the persuasive end of rhetoric rather than with the rhetorical process; how far this supposition is from the truth we shall discover presently.

The rhetorician's attention to style is here justified on the grounds that style (evidently regarded in this instance as the "dress" of thought) is often indispensable to the perfect interpretation (communication) of the thoughts and that its arts are a method of conciliating regard to the speaker. It is significant that these two grounds correspond to the terms of our interpretation of De Quincey's analysis in "Style" of the two functions performed by style wherever it is regarded as a mere instrumentality—the functions of rendering thought intelligible and of ingratiation.¹⁵ De Quincey here employs, in his reference to the second function, the Ciceronian term "conciliation," which represents a degradation of the Aristotelian concept of ethical proof.

Inasmuch as De Quincey views stylistic ornament and emotional appeal as similar in what he calls their subjectivity and their extraessential relation to matter, it would seem more logical had he admitted the second as well as the first to rhetoric, as a ministerial agent, instead of assigning it exclusively to a distinct form of discourse known as "eloquence."¹⁶ His exclusion of emotional persuasion from rhetoric must be regarded as an eccentric feature of his theory. Its probable *raison d'être* will be discussed presently.

¹⁵ The description in the "Rhetoric" of the second function as "conciliation" supports the view advanced in the last chapter that De Quincey is confused when he defines that function by the word "power" rather than by some such term as "conciliation."

¹⁶ The definition De Quincey gives of eloquence is hardly satisfactory, inasmuch as it makes no reference to persuasive purpose. It is so general that it might be interpreted to take in all of the literature of power. But it is significant that elsewhere De Quincey says, "One step further in passion, and the orator would become a poet" ("Autobiography," II, 64).

The formal definition of rhetoric with which the passage above ends suggests, in its statement that the aspects of truth brought into strong relief by rhetoric are supported by no spontaneous feelings but rest upon artificial aids, an idea more far-reaching than the one that rhetoric excludes a deliberate appeal to the passions. It appears to deny that the themes of the rhetorician are such as stand in any relation to the power of intuitive feeling, to the understanding heart. And yet De Quincey has named examples of themes suited to rhetorical treatment, such as "the goodness of human nature and its wickedness; the happiness of human life and its misery,"¹⁷ which plainly are susceptible to realization by the feelings. Must we not say that in his zeal to make rhetoric a purely intellectual exercise De Quincey has, in the definition we are considering, permitted himself an extremeness of statement he would not have endorsed on sober reconsideration? The explanation may be that he has carelessly attached to the themes of rhetoric a qualification which really applies to the rhetorician's mode of treating them.¹⁸ It is conceivable that any theme, even one with large latent capacities for appealing to the feelings, may be treated in a cool and intellectual manner. It is presumably this manner of treatment that belongs to rhetoric. But whatever disposition we make of the difficulty, it would seem that rhetorical writing cannot fall within the field of the literature of power, for the literature of power "must operate . . . on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering *iris* of human passions, desires, and genial emotions."¹⁹

So far, except for the difficulties that arise in connection with his exclusion of feeling from rhetoric, De Quincey's theory appears to be self-consistent and not significantly different from that of Aristotle. Passing now, however, to those

¹⁷ "Rhetoric," X, 91.

¹⁸ Certainly there is no high degree of correlation between merely plausible ideas and ideas in no way related to the feelings. Indeed it might be urged that plausible truths are precisely those which are most often related to human hopes and fears. If De Quincey really means to impose a double limitation upon the subject matter of the rhetorician, rhetoric is a very restricted thing indeed.

¹⁹ "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 55.

further statements concerning the nature of rhetoric that are embedded in his survey of rhetorical literature, we come upon ideas that put De Quincey's theory in an entirely new light.

The survey begins with the assertion that rhetoric as a practiced art—*rhetorica utens*—"never made any advances amongst the Greeks to the brilliancy which it attained in Rome," despite the fact that as a theory, or *ars docens*, rhetoric was taught "with a fulness and an accuracy by the Grecian masters not afterwards approached."

... Up to a certain period, and throughout the palmy state of the Greek republics, we may account for it thus:—Rhetoric, in its finest and most absolute burnish, may be called an *eloquentia umbratica*; that is, it aims at an elaborate form of beauty which shrinks from the strife of business, and could neither arise nor make itself felt in a tumultuous assembly. Certain features, it is well known, and peculiar styles of countenance, which are impressive in a drawing-room become ineffective on a public stage. The fine tooling and delicate tracery of the cabinet artist is lost upon a building of colossal proportions. Extemporaneousness, again,—a favourable circumstance to impassioned eloquence,—is death to Rhetoric. Two characteristics indeed there were of a Greek popular assembly which must have operated fatally on the rhetorician: its fervour, in the first place; and, secondly, the coarseness of a real interest. All great rhetoricians in selecting their subject have shunned the determinate cases of real life: and even in the single instance of a deviation from the rule—that of the author (whoever he be) of the Declarations attributed to Quintilian—the cases are shaped with so romantic a generality, and so slightly circumstantiated, as to allow him all the benefit of pure abstractions.

We can readily understand, therefore, why the fervid oratory of the Athenian assemblies, and the intense reality of its interest, should stifle the growth of rhetoric: the smoke, tarnish, and demoniac glare of Vesuvius easily eclipse the pallid coruscations of the aurora borealis. And, in fact, amongst the greater orators of Greece there is not a solitary gleam of rhetoric.²⁰

This passage is far more surprising than anything else we have come upon in the essay. In particular, the declaration with which it ends is like a bombshell. It is now apparent that De Quincey's view of rhetoric is by no means the same as the Aristotelian view. For Aristotle, and for the Greeks generally, rhetoric was first and foremost a practical art, an

* "Rhetoric," X, 93-94.

instrument of persuasion in the law courts and the popular assemblies. But for De Quincey, rhetoric when finest "shrinks from the strife of business," from fervor and from "the coarseness of a real interest," and aims at an elaborate form of beauty. It is, then, after all, a fine art, rather than a practical one. In so far as rhetoric as conceived of by De Quincey stands in any close relationship to the classical idea, the parallelism is with the single branch of rhetoric called epideictic or demonstrative.

There are features of this passage which in themselves might give rise to the idea that De Quincey's conception of rhetoric is indeed one of ornamental composition rather than of intellectual suasion. For example, rhetoric is compared to the fine tooling and delicate tracery of the cabinet artist. But such an interpretation is out of keeping with De Quincey's entire development of his theory up to this point. If rhetoric is an affair of ornament, of manner, why all the attention to the kind of subject matter which is its province? Why the exclusion of feeling? And what of the express definition of style and the arts of ornament as the ministerial part of rhetoric? Unless De Quincey has turned his back upon all his previous argument, the beauty which rhetoric aims at is not, primarily at any rate, a beauty of style, that is, of style in the limited sense that the word always has for him when he thinks of it as a separable dress which is beautiful in itself. It is not, that is to say, a beauty of mere language or the manipulation of language. What, then, is it?

It is a beauty pertaining to the fashion in which—to revert to the terms of De Quincey's definition of rhetoric—certain aspects of truth are brought into strong relief by means of various and striking thoughts. It is a beauty of manipulating, not words, but thoughts. The correctness of this interpretation is made unmistakably clear by the remaining pages of the essay, and in particular by remarks De Quincey drops in the course of developing his argument that the great day of rhetoric has passed.

We have seen that he considered the conditions of life in Attic Greece unfavorable to rhetoric as a practiced art. He

proceeds to contend that it is in the literature of Rome that we find "the true El Dorado of rhetoric":

... Livy, and, above all preceding writers, Ovid, display the greatest powers of rhetoric in forms of composition which were not particularly adapted to favour that talent. The contest of Ajax and Ulysses for the arms of Achilles in one of the latter books of the *Metamorphoses* is a *chef-d'œuvre* of rhetoric, considering its metrical form; for metre . . . is no advantage to the rhetorician. The two Plinys, Lucan . . . Petronius Arbiter, and Quintilian, but above all the Senecas . . . have left a body of rhetorical composition such as no modern nation has rivalled. Even the most brilliant of these writers, however, were occasionally surpassed in particular *bravuras* of rhetoric by several of the Latin Fathers In fact, a little African blood operated as genially in this respect as Spanish, whilst an Asiatic cross was inevitably fatal, by prompting a diffusion and inflation of style radically hostile to the condensation of keen, arrowy rhetoric.²¹

The final remark about inflation of style as being hostile to rhetoric clinches the point that the beauty of rhetoric is not for De Quincey the beauty of ornamental composition, and invalidates the assertion of H. H. Hudson that De Quincey "favors the Asiatic" style of rhetoric.²²

In the Literature of Modern Europe [De Quincey continues] Rhetoric has been cultivated with success. But this remark applies only with any force to a period which is now long past; and it is probable, upon various considerations, that such another period will never revolve. The rhetorician's art in its glory and power has silently faded away before the stern tendencies of the age So multiplied are the modes of intellectual enjoyment in modern times that the choice is absolutely distracted; and in a boundless theatre of pleasures, to be had at little or no cost of intellectual activity, it would be marvellous indeed if any considerable audience could be found for an exhibition which presupposes a state of tense exertion on the part both of auditor and performer. *To hang upon one's own thoughts as an object of conscious interest, to play with them, to watch and pursue them through a maze of inversions, evolutions, and harlequin changes*, implies a condition of society either, like that in the monastic ages, forced to introvert its energies from mere defect of books (whence arose the scholastic metaphysics, admirable for its subtlety, but famishing the mind whilst

²¹ "Rhetoric," X, 95-96.

²² "De Quincey on Rhetoric and Public Speaking," in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans* (New York, 1925), p. 137.

it sharpened its edge in one exclusive direction); or, if it implies no absolute starvation of intellect, as in the case of the Roman rhetoric, which arose upon a considerable (though not very various) literature, it proclaims at least a quiescent state of the public mind, unoccupied with daily novelties, and at leisure from the agitations of eternal change.

Growing out of the same condition of society, there is another cause at work which will for ever prevent the resurrection of rhetoric: viz. the necessities of public business, its vast extent, complexity, fulness of details, and consequent vulgarity²³

The words italicized (the italics are mine) describe perfectly what is for De Quincey the essential characteristic of rhetoric. Rhetoric is mind play, or, as Masson puts it, "the art of intellectual and fantastic play with any subject to its utmost capabilities, or the art of enriching any main truth or idea by inweaving with it the largest possible amount of subsidiary and illustrative thought and fancy."²⁴

We leave in abeyance for the present De Quincey's idea that rhetoric as mind play flourishes only in quiet or introverted periods of history, and continue with further statements which amplify this definition of rhetoric. De Quincey names Donne as the first true rhetorician in English literature and asserts that the word "rhetorical" would have been a more accurate designation than "metaphysical" for his poetry and that of his school—an exceedingly acute remark, assuming the acceptability of this idea of rhetoric.

. . . In saying *that*, however, we must remind our readers that we revert to the original use of the word *Rhetoric*, as laying the principal stress upon the management of the thoughts, and only a secondary one upon the ornaments of style.²⁵ Few writers have shown a more extraor-

²³ "Rhetoric," X, 96-97.

²⁴ Editor's footnote, *Collected Writings*, X, 92-93. This is Masson's paraphrase of De Quincey's statement that rhetoric is "the art of aggrandizing and bringing out into strong relief, by means of various and striking thoughts, some aspect of truth which of itself is supported by no spontaneous feelings, and therefore rests upon artificial aids" (X, 92); but it is seen to be an acceptable paraphrase only in the light of De Quincey's later discussion. Masson himself expresses some uncertainty as to whether this can indeed represent De Quincey's own conception of rhetoric.

²⁵ This sentence is a confession of the fact that in the course of his discussion De Quincey does sometimes permit himself to think of an ornamental style as an essential factor in rhetoric—a twin factor to mind play itself.

dinary compass of powers than Donne; for he combined—what no other man has ever done—the last sublimation of dialectical subtlety and address with the most impassioned majesty. Massy diamonds compose the very substance of his poem on the *Metempsychosis*, thoughts and descriptions which have the fervent and gloomy sublimity of Ezekiel or Aeschylus, whilst a diamond dust of rhetorical brilliancies is strewed over the whole of his occasional verses and his prose. No criticism was ever more unhappy than that of Dr. Johnson's which denounces all this artificial display as so much perversion of taste. There cannot be a falser thought than this; for upon that principle a whole class of compositions might be vicious by conforming to its own ideal. The artifice and machinery of rhetoric furnishes in its degree as legitimate a basis for intellectual pleasure as any other; that the pleasure is of an inferior order, can no more attain the idea or model of the composition than it can impeach the excellence of an epigram that it is not a tragedy.²⁴

It is evidently Donne's "dialectical subtlety" that qualifies him as a rhetorician; impassioned majesty belongs rather to eloquence. The rhetorical brilliancies of which De Quincey speaks are brilliancies of the play of thought, of the management or manipulation of thought. But what is most interesting is the characterization of rhetorical mind play as artificial display, and the justification of such display as a source of intellectual pleasure. This, of course, is only complementary to the earlier statement that rhetoric aims at elaborate beauty. Beauty, in any specific sense, appears always to be for De Quincey, not power, not a pleasure of the feelings, but an intellectual delight.

In the statement that it is "the artifice and machinery" of rhetoric that furnishes pleasure, we have an admission that mind play itself, like style, is ministerial to an end beyond itself—to the end, presumably, of persuasion. But it is not in mind play as an instrumentality of persuasion that De Quincey is primarily interested; he is concerned with the pleasure that arises out of it directly as a thing in itself.

We may say that De Quincey's conception of rhetoric raises one factor of the persuasive process—namely, mind play or rhetorical invention—above the plane on which it is considered merely as a means to an end, precisely in the same

fashion as the theory of rhetoric as ornamental composition exalts the other factor, that is, style. We know from his theory of style that he concurs in the estimation of style, also, as a beautiful and pleasurable thing in itself, but we see that he does not choose to admit that conception of style into his definition of rhetoric. And we may hazard the guess that he does not so choose for the reason that he is concerned with obtaining recognition for mind play as a distinct interest, one which deserves a unique designation. Others have defined rhetoric in terms of the elevation of style into an activity *sui generis*; it is his object to define it in a way which apotheosizes the play of thoughts rather than that of words.

After Donne, De Quincey tells us, the next writers of distinction who came forward as rhetoricians were Burton, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Milton, in many of his prose works, but Milton's rhetoric, like Donne's, often ascends into eloquence. So also does that of Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne,

. . . who, if not absolutely the foremost in the accomplishments of art, were undoubtedly the richest, the most dazzling, and, with reference to their matter, the most captivating of [English] rhetoricians. In them first, and perhaps (if we except occasional passages in the German John Paul Richter) in them only, are the two opposite forces of eloquent passion and rhetorical fancy brought into an exquisite equilibrium,—approaching, receding,—attracting, repelling,—blending, separating,—chasing and chased, as in a fugue,—and again lost in a delightful interfusion, so as to create a middle species of composition, more various and stimulating to the understanding than pure eloquence, more gratifying to the affections than naked rhetoric.²⁷

From Sir Thomas Browne De Quincey instances the final chapter of the *Urn Burial*, and in particular its opening sentence, as a noble specimen of rhetoric. From Taylor he quotes several passages, drawn from different contexts, to illustrate the "florid or Corinthian order of rhetoric,"²⁸ passages rich in play of fancy and analogy. For Taylor's alternations between rhetoric and eloquence, we are told, Taylor was "indebted in mixed proportions to his own peculiar style of understanding and the nature of his subject":

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

. . . Where the understanding is not active and teeming, but possessed and filled by a few vast ideas (which was the case of Milton), there the funds of a varied rhetoric are wanting. On the other hand, where the understanding is all alive with the subtlety of distinctions, and nourished (as Jeremy Taylor's was) by casuistical divinity, the variety and opulence of the rhetoric is apt to be oppressive. But this tendency, in the case of Taylor, was happily checked and balanced by the commanding passion, intensity, and solemnity of his exalted theme, which gave a final unity to the tumultuous motions of his intellect.²⁹

That the situation in which "the understanding is all alive with the subtlety of distinctions" should be one productive of rich and brilliant rhetoric is, in terms of the definition of rhetoric as mind play, no more than what one would expect.

At this point in his survey of the literature of rhetoric De Quincey devotes a footnote to Shakespeare, Raleigh, and Bacon, whom he has omitted from his roll call of rhetoricians. Shakespeare, he says, "is no doubt a rhetorician *majorum gentium*; but he is so much more that scarcely an instance is to be found of his rhetoric which does not pass by fits into a higher element of eloquence or poetry."³⁰ The finest passages of Raleigh "are touched with a sadness too pathetic, and of too personal a growth, to fulfil the conditions of a gay rhetoric as an art rejoicing in its own energies."³¹ But it is the reasons De Quincey gives for the omission of Bacon that are of special interest:

. . . With regard to Lord Bacon the case is different. He had great advantages for rhetoric, being figurative and sensuous (as great thinkers must always be), and having no feelings too profound, or of a nature to disturb the balance of a pleasurable activity; but yet, if we except a few letters, and parts of a few speeches, he never comes forward as a rhetorician. The reason is that, being always in quest of absolute truth, he contemplates all subjects, not through the rhetorical fancy, which is most excited by mere seeming resemblances, and such as can only sustain themselves under a single phasis, but through the philosophic fancy, or that which rests upon real analogies. Another unfavourable

²⁹ "Rhetoric," X, 108.

³⁰ In view of the alternation of rhetoric and eloquence in Sir Thomas Browne and in Jeremy Taylor and of the mixture of the two in Donne, this reason does not seem a very satisfactory one for omitting Shakespeare from the roll of rhetoricians.

³¹ "Rhetoric," X, 108-109 n.

circumstance . . . is the short-hand style of his composition, in which the connexions are seldom fully developed.³²

De Quincey has not, it is gratifying to find, lost sight of the position laid down at the beginning of the essay, that rhetoric concerns itself with partial truth or the plausible rather than with truth absolute. But he gives us here more than a reassurance as to that: he contributes the very interesting distinction between the rhetorical fancy and the philosophic fancy,³³ as based on the distinction between "mere seeming resemblances" and real ones. The elaboration of resemblances that are apparent only, that are fanciful or nonliteral, is, we interpret him to mean, a mode of throwing a single aspect of truth into relief (which is the business of rhetoric); but its value stops there. De Quincey has a footnote to a passage in his translation of the *Laocoon* that explains this very point:

. . . being of necessity taken from a partial and oblique station (since, if it coincided with the central or absolute station of the reason, it would cease to be fanciful), such a thought [a fanciful thought] can, at most, include but a side-glimpse of the truth: the mind submits to it for a moment, but immediately hurries on to some other thought, under the feeling that the flash and sudden gleam of colourable truth, being as frail as the resemblances in clouds, would, like *them*, un mould and "dislimn" itself . . . under too steady and continued attention.³⁴

We may pose at this point the general question as to what connection, if any, exists between the idea that rhetoric deals only with partial and uncertain truths and the conception of it as mind play. De Quincey makes no direct statement concerning the matter, but it does not require much thought to suggest one answer. Surely the field of half-truths offers a far wider opportunity for pure mind play than does the field of factual or scientific or philosophic thought, where the movements of the mind are impeded by the recalcitrance of precise fact. In particular, seeming resemblances between things are more numerous and plastic than real ones.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Is not this distinction parallel to, if not identical with, the distinction between fancy and the imagination?

³⁴ XI, 179.

Except for De Quincey's discussion of Burke, the remaining pages of his account of English rhetoric contribute little to the understanding of the concept of mind play so far arrived at. We should, however, notice a statement concerning Lord Bolingbroke, who is said to be one of the three parliamentary orators "who have been particularly recorded to the ideal of a fine rhetorician." The statement is this: "It was no disadvantage to him [Bolingbroke] that he was shallow, being so luminous and transparent; and the splendour of his periodic diction, with his fine delivery, compensated his defect in imagery."³⁵ There are two things of interest here: the judgment that shallowness is not a defect in the rhetorician, and the evident—and surprising—acceptance of style as a factor of sufficient importance in itself to compensate for a defect in one aspect of mind play (imagery).

De Quincey's indifference to shallowness in rhetoric is one of the several aspects of his view that have been harshly criticized. But it is important to keep in mind that De Quincey is interested in the mere process of rhetoric as a thing in itself. Shallowness is an aspect of partiality of truth. If fullness of truth is not a desideratum, and if brilliance of mind play is, it is difficult to see how shallowness is a fault. So long as rhetoric remains a mere play of thought, so long as it is not considered as an influence upon belief and action, as an engine of persuasion, the measure of truth contained in it would seem irrelevant to its degree of merit.³⁶ To say this is not to defend De Quincey's view of rhetoric as an adequate one; it is only to justify his attitude toward the quality of shallowness as being consistent with the theory of mind play itself.

³⁵ "Rhetoric," X, 111-112.

³⁶ It is true that in an entirely different context De Quincey does apparently recognize a correlation between the merit of rhetoric and the burden of truth it carries: "Rhetoric, according to its quality, stands in many degrees of relation to the permanencies of truth; and all rhetoric, like all flesh, is partly unreal, and the glory of both is fleeting But, if all rhetoric is a mode of pyrotechny, and all pyrotechnics are by necessity fugitive, yet even in these frail pomps there are many degrees of frailty" ("Charles Lamb," V, 231-232).

As for De Quincey's favorable mention of Bolingbroke's "periodic diction" as a thing apparently valuable in itself, it may be said at once that De Quincey does not adhere with perfect consistency to the belief that style, in relation to rhetoric, is of ministerial value only. Inasmuch as he does view style in general as a fountain of the beautiful per se and a source of intellectual pleasure, and inasmuch as he views rhetoric as aiming at beauty and intellectual pleasure, it is but natural that he should at moments relax his concern to identify rhetoric with mind play only and recognize beauty of style as a twin interest to beauty of thought manipulation. This is most conspicuously seen at the end of the essay, where he defends elaborate stateliness of style against Whately's condemnation of it and says:

. . . An imbecile friend of ours, in 1825, brought us a sovereign of a new coinage: "Which," said he, "I admire, because it is so elegantly simple." This, he flattered himself, was thinking like a man of taste. But mark how we sent him to the right about: "And *that*, weak-minded friend, is exactly the thing which a coin ought not to be: the duty of a golden coin is to be as florid as it can, rich with Corinthian ornaments, and as gorgeous as a peacock's tail." So of rhetoric.³⁷

De Quincey's discussion of Burke is somewhat puzzling. It begins, "All hail to Edmund Burke, the supreme writer of his century, the man of the largest and finest understanding!"³⁸ It is the natural assumption that Burke is being introduced on the roll call of great rhetoricians, but the remarks that follow are such as to throw doubt on the idea. As we have seen in another context,³⁹ De Quincey proceeds with a defense of Burke against the "miserable twaddlers" who with obstinate stupidity have "brayed away for one third of a century about that which ye are pleased to call his 'fancy.'"

. . . As if Edmund Burke were the man to play with his fancy for the purpose of separable ornament! He was a man of fancy in no other sense than as Lord Bacon was so, and Jeremy Taylor, and as all large and discursive thinkers are and must be . . . In *that* sense, and for that purpose [the purpose of detecting more relations and pursuing

³⁷ "Rhetoric," X, 130.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁹ *Supra*, pp. 162-163.

them steadily], Burke is figurative: but, understood, as he *has* been understood by the long-eared race of his critics, not as thinking in and by his figures, but as deliberately laying them on by way of enamel or after-ornament,—not as *incarnating*, but simply as *dressing* his thoughts in imagery,—so understood, he is not the Burke of reality, but a poor fictitious Burke, modelled after the poverty of conception which belongs to his critics.

It is true, however, that in some rare cases Burke *did* indulge himself in a pure rhetorician's use of fancy; consciously and profusely lavishing his ornaments for mere purposes of effect.⁴⁰

It is confusing first of all that De Quincey should group Bacon and Taylor together with respect to the sense in which they were men of fancy, for though describing Taylor as one of the most eminent of rhetoricians he has denied the name of rhetorician to Bacon on the ground that he contemplated all subjects through the philosophic fancy in terms of real analogies. It would seem that De Quincey has abandoned the distinction between the rhetorical and the philosophic fancy in favor of a distinction between two uses of imagery (imagery that in both uses is a product of fancy considered as an undifferentiated thing)—imagery as a dressing of the thoughts and imagery as an incarnation of them—and that he recognizes the first use as belonging to the pure rhetorician and the second as belonging to some one else. The first paragraph of the passage can hardly be interpreted except as a defense of Burke against the charge of being a rhetorician; the second concedes that he sometimes writes as a rhetorician.

But consider the following extract from De Quincey's criticism of French rhetoric a few pages later on:

. . . Finally, it may be remarked of the imagery in the French rhetoric that it is thinly sown, commonplace, deficient in splendour, and above all merely ornamental; that is to say, it does no more than echo and repeat what is already said in the thought which it is brought to illustrate; whereas in Jeremy Taylor and in Burke it will be found usually to extend and amplify the thought, or to fortify it by some indirect argument of its truth We are thus reconciled to the proposition by the same image which illustrates it.⁴¹

The French rhetoricians are here criticized for making what De Quincey has described as a purely rhetorical use of

* "Rhetoric," X, 114-115.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

imagery! And Burke is praised, evidently as a superior rhetorician, for making a more organic use of it.

The best way out of the tangle would appear to be to say that De Quincey has erred, has got off the track of his real thought, in defining the purely rhetorical use of imagery as an ornamental one, for in that definition he has allowed imagery to become a matter of style rather than of free mind play. He has, in other words, allowed rhetoric to become an art of ornamental composition. And it is part of his error that he has blurred or abandoned the significant distinction between rhetorical thinking as based on mere seeming resemblances and nonrhetorical or philosophic thinking as based on real analogies. The truth is probably that Burke was both a rhetorical and a philosophic thinker—but a rhetorician not merely on those occasions on which De Quincey states that he made a pure rhetorician's use of fancy as a dressing of his thoughts. This is clearly the view that emerges from the totality of De Quincey's statements about him.⁴²

In his brief discussion of German rhetoric—or rather of the idea that German rhetoric is nonexistent⁴³—De Quincey is incautious enough again to speak as though rhetoric were primarily an affair of stylistic beauty; but in his summary of French rhetorical literature he returns to his original position, while introducing a new inconsistency of thought.

. . . In France, whatever rhetoric they have . . . arose in the age of Louis XIV; since which time the very same development of science and

⁴² We may notice a further statement De Quincey makes in connection with his account of the French rhetoricians: "The smooth monotony of the leading religious topics, as managed by the French orators, receives under the treatment of Jeremy Taylor at each turn of the sentence a new flexure, or what may be called a separate *articulation*; old thoughts are surveyed from novel stations and under various angles; and a field absolutely exhausted throws up eternally fresh verdure under the fructifying lava of burning imagery." To this sentence descriptive of mind play as found in Taylor, De Quincey adds a footnote about Burke that indicates clearly that he, too, is notable for a (rhetorical) play of thought: ". . . under his treatment every truth . . . grows in the very act of unfolding it Some collateral adjunct of the main proposition, some temperament or restraint, some oblique glance at its remote affinities, will invariably be found to attend the progress of his sentences . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 125).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 121–123.

public business operated there as in England to stifle the rhetorical impulses, and all those analogous tendencies in arts and in manners which support it. Generally it may be assumed that rhetoric will not survive the age of the ceremonious in manners and the gorgeous in costume. An unconscious sympathy binds together the various forms of the elaborate and the fanciful, under every manifestation. Hence it is that the national convulsions by which modern France has been shaken produced orators . . . but no rhetoricians.

We might well expect that elaborateness of style as well as of mind play would have vanished, if indeed the various forms of the elaborate are bound together; but De Quincey continues:

. . . Florian, Chateaubriand, and others, who have written the most florid prose that the modern taste can bear, are elegant sentimentalists, sometimes maudlin and semi-poetic, sometimes even eloquent, but never rhetorical. There is no eddying about their own thoughts; no motion of fancy self-sustained from its own activities; no flux and reflux of thought, half meditative, half capricious; but strains of feeling, genuine or not, supported at every step from the excitement of independent external objects.⁴⁴

In the statement in the final sentence of the qualities wanting in the later French oratory, we have yet another, and perhaps the best, definition of mind play. And with it we may bring to a close our survey of the essential definitive passages in the "Rhetoric."

Before proceeding, in a new section, to an evaluation of the view of rhetoric we have been concerned with analyzing, it will be interesting to notice an independent definition of rhetoric which De Quincey gives us in the "Style," written some twelve years later than the "Rhetoric":

. . . There is in fact a complex distinction to which the word Rhetoric is liable. 1st, it means the *rhetorica utens*, as when we praise the rhetoric of Seneca or Sir Thomas Browne, not meaning anything which they taught, but something which they practised,—not a doctrine which they delivered, but a machinery of composition which they employed. 2dly, it means the *rhetorica docens*, as when we praise the Rhetoric of Aristotle or Hermogenes, writers far enough from being rhetorical by their own style of writing, but writers who professedly taught others to be rhetorical. 3dly, the *rhetorica utens* itself is sub-

divided into two meanings, so wide apart that they have very little bearing on each other: one being applied to the art of persuasion, the dexterous use of plausible topics for recommending any opinion whatever to the favour of an audience (this is the Grecian sense universally); the other being applied to the art of composition, the art of treating any subject ornamentally, gracefully, affectingly. There is another use of the word rhetoric distinct from all these, and hitherto, we believe, not consciously noticed; of which at some other time.

Now, this last subdivision of the word rhetoric, viz. "Rhetoric considered as a practising art, *rhetorica utens*,"—which is the sense exclusively indicated by our modern use of the term,—is not at all concerned in the Rhetoric of Aristotle. It is rhetoric as a mode of moral suasion, as a technical system for obtaining a readiness in giving to the false a colouring of plausibility, to the doubtful a colouring of probability, or in giving to the true, when it happens to be obscure, the benefit of a convincing exposition,—this it is which Aristotle undertakes to teach, and not at all the art of ornamental composition.⁴⁵

It is, of course, with De Quincey's subdivision of the *rhetorica utens*—and with the mysterious allusion to yet another sense of the word "rhetoric" "hitherto . . . not consciously noticed"—that we are concerned.

Obviously, the two divisions of the *rhetorica utens* here defined correspond to the two poles between which, in the "Rhetoric," De Quincey declares the prevailing popular conception of rhetoric to fluctuate.⁴⁶ Neither corresponds to his own conception of rhetoric as mind play existing for its own sake. But what of that other "use of the word rhetoric distinct from all these"? Must we not suppose, in spite of the fact that his reference is to some future treatment of the idea rather than to a past one, in spite of the fact that he speaks of it as hitherto not consciously noticed, that he has in mind his own view of mind play? It is, indeed, difficult to imagine what still further conception he might be thinking of; and though, on the theory that his reference is to the

⁴⁵ "Style," X, 217-218.

⁴⁶ There is unquestionable correspondence, though not identity. De Quincey's definitions of the poles of the popular conception are couched in the narrowest, most disparaging terms possible ("sophistry" or "fraud," and "ostentatious ornament"). The statement in the present passage that rhetoric as ornamental composition is "the sense exclusively indicated by our modern use of the term" is, of course, inconsistent with his earlier position.

idea of mind play, it is admittedly odd that he should be forgetful of or should ignore his own presentation of it in the "Rhetoric," yet it is less odd than to suppose that he would ignore the conception itself when detailing the possible meanings of "rhetoric."

However this may be, the real contribution of the present passage is its demonstration of the fact that, on an occasion when he is not preoccupied with the development of his own special view, De Quincey recognizes the validity of the other conceptions.

II. VALUES AND IMPLICATIONS OF DE QUINCEY'S VIEW OF RHETORIC

De Quincey's "Rhetoric" has been a source of bewilderment and even of dismay to his critics. The view of rhetoric set forth in it has been criticized on the same grounds as those on which De Quincey himself criticizes what he defines as the prevailing popular conception of his day: it is lacking in unity and it degrades the idea of rhetoric.

We are not here concerned with the minor inconsistencies of De Quincey's treatment (such as his failure to think always of style in terms of the purely ministerial function he assigns it), but with the charge that his conception shifts from the idea of rhetoric as a practical art to the idea that it is exclusively a fine art, the function of which is to give intellectual pleasure. There is, of course, nothing objectionable in the view that rhetoric is both a practical art and a fine art, on the same or on different occasions; but that is not the view that De Quincey sets forth in the "Rhetoric." Whereas in the introductory part of the essay he gives the impression that he is thinking of rhetoric as having the function of persuasion, from the beginning of the historical portion to the end he speaks as though rhetoric were solely a fine art of beautiful mind play.

It is the opinion of this writer that a fair case may be made against the charge that De Quincey is guilty of any real unsteadiness in his view of rhetoric as presented in this essay,

but that, inasmuch as to acquit him of fundamental inconsistency is to convict him of a fault perhaps even more serious—that of presenting throughout an impossibly inadequate view of the nature of rhetoric—there is no great point in belaboring the evidence: his treatment is unsatisfactory on the one ground if not on the other. Certain considerations tending to show that his view is reasonably coherent may, however, be briefly presented.

The idea that rhetoric is a fine art, and not a practical one, does indeed strike the reader as a surprise. It is true that De Quincey had appeared to define persuasion as the goal of rhetoric, but the sole phrase of his which cannot (in the light of his later discussion) be interpreted as signifying that persuasion is a purely formal goal, designed to give directives and structure to the game of mind play—the phrase “Rhetoric, whether meant for an influence upon the actions, or simply upon the belief”⁴⁷—is a very casual one. De Quincey’s emphasis is all on the materials and methods of rhetoric, not, in the first part of the essay, upon function. One has the feeling that, in so far as he refers to function at all, before he is ready to present his own special theory of pleasure as a function, he speaks half tentatively, half absent-mindedly, in terms of the conventional view.

But the strongest argument in favor of the idea that De Quincey has in mind from the start the theory of mind play as an end in itself is that the stipulations he lays down as to the nature of rhetoric are such in every instance as to favor the freest and broadest realization of that activity. To decree the subordination of style to the thoughts is to clear the field for mind play. To define the province of rhetoric as that of plausible truth and half-truth is to license it. Most particularly, to exclude all appeal to the feelings is to call for concentration upon a purely intellectual process. So far as the influencing of action or belief is concerned, the exclusion of feeling is a very dubious benefit, but to mind play itself it is an aid, for the *feeling* of truth, once admitted, is likely

⁴⁷ “Rhetoric,” X, 91.

to give its own character to the situation, thus interfering with the interest of mere manipulation of ideas.

It is the opinion of Hudson that De Quincey is of two minds about rhetoric, and that

. . . to leave De Quincey . . . thinking of rhetoric as a game, its end-product the "intellectual pleasure" of a few connoisseurs, and pointing to Ovid, Petronius Arbiter, the Senecas, Sir Thomas Browne, and Jeremy Taylor as its greatest players, would be to do him injustice and to miss the best part of his contribution upon the subject. We can appeal from De Quincey drunk with the heady rhythms of *rhetoriqueurs* to De Quincey the sober critic and craftsman; from the De Quincey who says, "All great rhetoricians in selecting their subject have shunned the determinate causes⁴⁸ of real life," to the De Quincey who honors Edmund Burke as supreme—if not supreme as "a pure rhetorician," then as something unnamed (an impure rhetorician, perhaps), but of a higher order. The soldier who plays at sham battles and who parades in review may also fight, even without changing his uniform; and though there may not have been any soccer at the battle of the Marne, we have it upon good authority that there were some gleams of cricket at Waterloo.

What is needed to convert rhetorical play into earnest is a persuasive purpose. Given this, De Quincey's art of play becomes Aristotle's art of war.⁴⁹

This is admirably put, with gleams of mind play that illustrate its employment for a persuasive purpose, and as a statement of what must have been De Quincey's general position with respect to rhetoric (as evidenced by the passage we have quoted from the "Style") it is acceptable enough. But it does not, in the opinion of the present writer, accurately describe the relationship of ideas in the "Rhetoric."⁵⁰ Drunk De Quincey may be, on the potent brew of mind play; but

⁴⁸ Hudson misquotes De Quincey, who says "cases."

⁴⁹ Hudson, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

⁵⁰ Hudson appears to misinterpret the meaning of De Quincey's "determinate cases of real life"; at least he is mistaken in appealing from De Quincey's verdict concerning their relation to rhetoric to his judgment on Burke as a supreme writer. There is one place (so far unnoticed) in which De Quincey praises Burke precisely for the fact that he rose above such subject matter—above "the dust and rubbish of individuality," "the tangible realities of things and persons," to the realm of general and abstract ideas. The realm of generalization is precisely, for De Quincey, that of rhetoric; generalizations, or at least those of a deductive character, are only plausible truths.

if so, his inebriation, once effected, is unmitigated by soberer thoughts.

Probably the best way of describing De Quincey's treatment of his subject in the "Rhetoric" is as a specimen of rhetoric itself. He takes one aspect of the truth about rhetoric (the aspect that the process of rhetorical invention is in itself capable of giving intellectual delight) and throws it into high relief, meanwhile "withdrawing the mind so steadily from all thoughts or images which support the other [side of the truth] as to leave it practically under the possession of a one-sided estimate."⁵¹ And he does this, we may say, partly for the sheer pleasure of playing with the notion of rhetoric as a fine art, for the satisfaction of seeing what can be done with it; and partly for the sake of aggrandizing the truth involved. His treatment is "half meditative, half capricious."

We turn then to an evaluation of the doctrine of mind play as an end in itself, considered as only one section of the truth about rhetoric. That it is indeed one section of the truth we have already assumed: the proposition would appear to be beyond argument that the mind may take pleasure in watching its own thoughts while pursuing them through a maze of motions. The question is, Is this pleasure an ignoble one? It is difficult for this writer to see how it could be regarded as being such. The question of belief or action upon belief is not involved so long as the game remains only a game. The rhetorician, as artist, is not interested in recommending an opinion but merely in the activity of presenting it brilliantly. Mind play for its own sake can be viewed with suspicion only if it develops a faculty which, when harnessed to the purpose of serious persuasion, is of greater assistance in recommending falsehood than in recommending truth. The teachers of rhetoric, from Aristotle down, have pleaded convincingly that rhetoric is more useful than harmful for the reason that truth and justice are naturally stronger than their opposites, but that only he who

⁵¹ "Rhetoric," X, 91.

is an initiate in the artifices of persuasion is in a position to defend the truth against the uses of them which evil men are certain to make.

Mind play for its own sake may perhaps be judged as an opiate of action, or even of real belief, and therefore as a dangerous thing to indulge in in situations where the arrival at settled conviction is personally or socially desirable. But as De Quincey is the first to point out, rhetoric as a fine art does not flourish in ages that are preoccupied with practical problems. He goes, indeed, almost too far in the position that he takes. It may be urged that life in every age has room for a certain amount of pure pleasure and that, as a matter of fact, we do find rhetoric in the literature of every age—and in the conversation of nearly all persons. Most of us experience in informal argument, as well as in everyday banter, a measure of satisfaction in the mere manipulation of ideas. In argument this element is associated with, yet distinct from, the pleasure of personal triumph in competitive thinking. The modern personal essay (a genre, it is true, that in its lighter forms has declined almost to the vanishing point in this age of general intellectual crisis) is in some instances nothing but pure rhetoric in De Quincey's sense. A certain section of modern scholarship is little more than an intellectual game (and as such, to be sure, merits condemnation in so far as it represents a diversion of social energy from work crying to be done). There is rhetoric in modern poetry, as in the psychologizings of E. A. Robinson.⁵²

It is the feeling of this writer that De Quincey's "Rhetoric" represents a genuine contribution to the understanding of an impulse of the mind that is almost universal and that should be recognized as a factor in human thinking, whatever may be the difference of opinion as to its value. Just as our consciousness of the part played in argumentation by

⁵² This is not to suggest that the mind play in Robinson and other modern poets who show a fondness for subtlety of analysis exists only for pleasure. Its final end may well be truth—the illumination of the varied facets of ideas. But the same thing could be said—though it is not De Quincey's concern to say it—of the rhetoric of Donne and Browne.

the factor of wish belief and emotive thinking has been enormously sharpened by the recent researches of psychologists, so our consciousness of the element of mere mind play in argumentation and elsewhere may be made alert and definite by a thoughtful reading of De Quincey. To understand the activity of mind play as an end in itself is also to understand more fully the nature of practical rhetorical invention—of that process of the mind's eddying about ideas by which, when serious purpose is present, new perceptions are arrived at and effective techniques of presentation conceived of. While there is an important point in De Quincey's distinction between the rhetorical and the philosophic fancy, the distinction is surely less than absolute (as is likewise the distinction between probable and scientific truth), and the mind that is creative in pure rhetoric may be said to possess an equipment useful also in the realm of purposive thinking.

It is of course regrettable that De Quincey did not pursue the subject of rhetoric scientifically rather than rhetorically. Had he done so, he would have avoided not only half-truth and the appearance of inconsistency, but also the misfortune of being discovered in certain real discrepancies—such as that of describing the masterpieces of English rhetoric as works in which there is a blending or an alternation of rhetoric and eloquence, after having decreed the separation of rhetoric and feeling. His essay would have escaped giving many readers the impression of being nothing more than a brilliant tour de force. Attention would not have been drawn away from its really pregnant ideas and focused upon its faults. But most important of all, a scientific treatment would almost certainly have led him to a direct examination of the important relationship between mind play as an end in itself and mind play as an engine of purposive thinking and writing. He might, for example, have touched upon the idea that mind play often gives rise to statements (mere sentences or whole compositions) experimental in character, in which the writer expresses a thought in order to discover precisely what it is like and to fix it in his own mind as a

possible truth. One suspects that a great deal of literature consists of experimental statement.

It is somewhat curious that throughout the "Rhetoric" De Quincey takes a mechanical view of the relationship between mind play and style, conceiving of style only as the dress of the thoughts. Since he does so, it is logical enough that he should, except in absent-minded moments, regard style as no more than the handmaiden of mind play. But the opportunity was perfect for taking an organic view of style, for regarding it as something larger than the mere manipulation of language in the interest of communicating lucidly and ingratiatingly ideas and fancies fully formed before style begins its work. It would have been in keeping with his own later analysis of the conditions under which style and matter are indivisible, in which thinking proceeds through style, had he defined the style of rhetoric as an incarnation of its mind play. A rhetorical subject as he defines it is precisely a *quaestio infinita*, is fully "subjective" in his sense of the word. That is the meaning of his description of it as indeterminate and as rising above the individual to the general and abstract. Merely probable ideas are necessarily abstract.

Had the "Rhetoric" been written later than the "Style" we should have had to charge De Quincey with being forgetful of his best perceptions in the latter essay; as it is, we can only express wonderment that he failed to reach those later perceptions on an occasion so auspicious. It would have been completely logical for him to have identified the process of mind play with the stylistic process, and so to have arrived at the idea of a fine art that was at once an art of the manipulation of thought and of the manipulation of style. His conception, enunciated in the "Style," of a fine art of style alone, of style as a thing separable in thought from matter, is hardly a credible one; at least one cannot conceive of a type of literature which exists to give free play to such an art. But rhetoric, viewed as a fine art, would appear to be precisely an art of style (as much as of mind play), once style is taken in the organic sense as an incarnation of thought.

Rhetoric, however, we may suggest at this point, might have been more adequately defined as a kind of thinking and writing which may enter into various species of composition than as itself a species of literature. Such a definition would widen enormously the place of rhetoric within literature and would obviate the difficulty of acknowledging as the best English literature of rhetoric a literature which is as much one of eloquence as of rhetoric.

It is possible to argue that De Quincey's theory of rhetoric as mind play represents his most substantial specific contribution to critical theory. Certainly it is original in a sense in which most of his literary theory is not. It owes nothing to eighteenth-century rhetoric, and what it owes to Aristotle and to certain of his interpreters, though important in itself, is not exactly central. Its source may be described as the course taken by his own mind play—as determined by the bent of his own mind. De Quincey's own genius was required to call attention to the pleasures of rhetoric.

This brings us to the problem of an evaluation of De Quincey's view of rhetoric in terms of the contribution it makes to an understanding of De Quincey as a critic. It may be said at once that the idea of mind play as a pleasurable activity per se is the key to the understanding of the character of his criticism in general. Our thesis is that the special character of his interest in criticism is rhetorical.

De Quincey was, as he himself tells us, an intellectual creature. The process of generating, defining, analyzing ideas engaged his attention more than did anything else. His sharp and subtle schoolman's intellect delighted in what may be called the processing of ideas, in clear distinctions, in amplification. No better example could be found of the man who delights in thinking for thinking's sake. De Quincey's intellectual passion was more for thinking than for knowing.

This characteristic of his mind and his definition of rhetoric explain each other. He realized that most literature is for knowledge or for power; but because for him the mere activity of thinking was such an important end he was

led to reserve one species of literature for the free play of it alone, and he called this species "rhetoric." It was his love of precise distinctions, of neat boundaries, that led him to a definition at once brilliant and impossible—a valuable half-truth.

The rhetorical character of De Quincey's mind—or rather of one side of it, for it is the paradox of his mentality (and this paradox is the background of the one in his literary theory) that it united an interest in the activity of purely intellectual thinking with a profound concern for the truths of emotional thinking—accounts for the salient formal characteristics of his criticism, both good and bad. It accounts for the fact that he is given to the making of fine distinctions and the laying down of definitive boundaries between the forms and aspects of literature (a habit of thought out of keeping with the romantic tendency of the age to disregard exact boundaries), for rhetoric is an affair of dialectical subtlety and of minute distinction. It accounts for the myriad inconsistencies that plague the student of De Quincey's thought and give rise to rhetorical activity on the part of those who seek to explain them away, for rhetoric is given to the elaboration of single aspects of truth and not to synthesis. It accounts for his discursiveness, for the rhetorician is always open to the temptation of allowing mind play to escape from its artificial directives. It accounts for the fact that he never developed a system of criticism, but was an improviser, starting on every new occasion with whatever subject or idea came to hand, for mind play may begin at any point, and its every flight is complete in itself—in so far as it is complete at all. It accounts for the absence of any perceptible development in his thought, for thinking which is peculiarly concerned with the quality of itself as a process rather than with feeling its way toward a comprehensive view of the truth is unlikely to show development. It accounts for the occasional downright absurdities of his thought, such as his explanation of the failure of the Greeks to produce printed books in terms of their alleged failure to wear linen instead of woollen clothing, for rhetoric unchecked by a sense of responsibility to de-

terminate fact, and proceeding deductively in its own irresponsible fashion, may arrive at fantastic conclusions. And, to end with a virtue, it accounts for the emergence of sudden and pregnant *aperçus*, for such are the finest fruit of mind play.

De Quincey's own critical writing, and much of his miscellaneous writing as well, is in itself a refutation of his idea that the age of rhetoric is past. The circumstances of his life and the general character of his orientation to the world he lived in permitted the indulgence of his proclivity for rhetorical thought. He was half gentleman-scholar, half practical journalist in an age when magazine readers still took a curious interest in the play of thought upon the most miscellaneous topics. That he was a conservative in politics and a traditionalist in religion helped greatly to insulate him from such forces of the age as might have impeded the development of the rhetorical habit of mind and its free expression; his intellectual crisis, in philosophy, came early, before he began to write. His social sympathies were not alert, deeply sympathetic as he was with individuals who suffered misfortune or were outcasts (is there anywhere in literature a more sympathetic treatment than his of Ann of Oxford Street?). There is little in his work which shows awareness of the ferment into which men's minds were passing or had already passed; his mode of existence was almost a monkish one, his tastes almost antiquarian. All of these are considerations which, in combination with his own natural predilections, serve to explain why, in an age when no other creative critic touched upon a subject so remote from the center of romantic interest as rhetoric, De Quincey became at once a practicing rhetorician and a philosopher of rhetoric—almost certainly the most original one since Aristotle.

III. PLEASURE VERSUS POWER IN DE QUINCEY'S AESTHETIC

We have evaluated De Quincey's theory of rhetoric as a thing in itself and for the contribution it makes to an interpretation of the characteristics of his own critical and miscellaneous writings. Let us turn finally to a discussion of the

central anomaly in his theory of literature as viewed in the light of it.

There is no place for rhetoric—considered as a species of literature—within either the literature of knowledge or the literature of power. Knowledge is at best a by-product of mind play that exists for its own beauty, and even as a by-product rhetorical knowledge is but a knowledge of probability. There is no question of power in rhetoric according to De Quincey's strictest definition, for rhetoric communicates neither deep sympathy nor absolute truth. Rhetoric is purely intellectual; it is amoral; its interest is in itself as an activity. It must take its place, therefore, as a third category of literature, a category whose basis is altogether different from those principles which determine the categories of knowledge and power, both of which are founded upon an analysis of literature in terms of its content or final meaning.

Since rhetoric is a restricted species—according to De Quincey, indeed, a vanishing one—it does not in itself seriously invalidate the general proposition that literature proper is the same as the literature of power. But it is De Quincey's premise in the "Rhetoric" that the fine arts in general exist to give beauty and pleasure, rather than truth and power, that rhetoric is a fine art precisely because it is dedicated to intellectual pleasure. The "Rhetoric" thus reënforces the theory of pleasure as set forth or assumed in the passage on style as a fine art in "Language," the passage on the principle of *idem in alio* in the paper on the *Antigone*, the footnote in the "Laocoon" on freedom versus necessity in the fine arts, and the "Postscript on Didactic Poetry." The "Rhetoric" is simply De Quincey's most sustained treatment of a particular art in terms of the theory of pleasure.

Our discussion in Chapter III led to the conclusion that for De Quincey the beauty of the fine arts is a beauty of workmanship or execution, and that it consists in the resolution of the conflict between the forces of necessity and freedom. This conflict—and its resolution—was seen to be present in the very principle of *idem in alio*, which he de-

clares to be the first principle of every fine art; and his special discussion of its presence in the arts of didactic poetry, dancing, and sculpture was noted. Surely then it is the operative principle in rhetoric. We may say that the force of necessity is represented in rhetoric by the purpose of persuasion which, according to our interpretation of De Quincey, the rhetorician artificially adopts; the freedom is that of mind play itself.

It is true that De Quincey does not explicitly mention this conflict in regard to rhetoric, but the elements of it are present in the terms of his treatment. Presumably the reason for his failure to recognize it is that his attention is focused on the aspect of freedom. This focusing, in turn, can be explained as an expression of his own habits of composition. We have said that De Quincey himself is a rhetorician, that the "Rhetoric" in particular is a brilliant example of mind play. But De Quincey's own rhetoric is an imperfect one, which slights discipline; it is inattention to the claims of "necessity" in his mind play, rather than the ideal of mind play as an end in itself, which really explains the worst defects of his writing—such as inconsistency within a single context and frequent utter want of proportion and totality of treatment. Had his attention been focused less intently upon the free aspect of mind play, he would doubtless have integrated the two parts of the "Rhetoric" by an analysis of the true relation of a persuasive purpose to the beauty of mind play, and would have shown that the adoption of such a purpose not only affords an occasion for rhetoric as a free activity but that it creates difficulties, in the successful overcoming of which one aspect of rhetorical beauty lies. In doing this he would have brought his theory of rhetoric completely into line with his other pronouncements on artistic beauty.

Surely we may say that the "Rhetoric," taken in conjunction with the other contexts in which the theory of pleasure is set forth or assumed, is sufficient to establish the thesis that there is a prevailing conflict in De Quincey's thought between the theories of pleasure and power, though one that

De Quincey gives no sign of recognizing. This may be taken as the most general result of the present study. Heretofore De Quincey's view of art as a mode of intellectual pleasure has been largely ignored, his theory of power being commonly accepted as the total view.

The fact that De Quincey holds both views is not in itself particularly remarkable. Such a dualism is almost inevitable in any theory of literature which recognizes style or process as something distinct from content or meaning; it shows itself throughout the history of criticism, appearing most frequently in the doctrine that poetry exists at once to delight and to instruct. Among De Quincey's contemporaries it manifests itself most clearly in the poetic theory of Wordsworth. What is peculiar in De Quincey is, first of all, that he separately defines each function as though it were the only one, that he both eloquently defines the function of art as being nothing less than the communication of deep sympathy with the highest truth and defines it as being no more than the pleasuring of the mind through the beautiful manipulation of selected materials. But the paradox goes further than that. The ultimate anomaly is that De Quincey is at once the critic of his day who goes furthest in separating the ideas of substance and form—so far as to make a separate art out of form—and the one who did the most, through defining style as the incarnation of thought, to diffuse the concept of a completely organic relationship between the two. This anomaly is made possible by the fact that he stopped short in the application of the organic principle, applying it only to certain varieties of writing that he considered to be "subjective" in a special sense, as well as by the fact that he failed to rise, on more than a few occasions, to a sufficiently comprehensive concept of style. We have seen that his notion of style shows a perpetual tendency to shrink to that of mere manipulation of language.

But these are not ultimate explanations. For such we must return to certain of the conclusions arrived at in Chapter II. There it was seen that De Quincey viewed romantic metaphysics as little more than a brilliant but questionable

creation of mind play and that the key to an understanding of his philosophical position is the curious fact that he was at once preëminently an intellectual creature (to use his own term) and a moral mystic. Because he failed to take romantic metaphysics seriously (and because his attitude toward earlier intellectual mysticisms was similarly distrustful), he was left without a philosophical basis for an interpretation of the beautiful in nature or in art as an expression of the real. The true and the good he identifies on the basis of his moral mysticism, but the relation of the true and the beautiful is left indeterminate. He was not, therefore, in a position to carry the organic theory of the identity of substance and form to its logical end. His nearest approach to the organic view, in his definition of style as being sometimes the incarnation of thought, is empirical rather than speculative.

Precisely because De Quincey was by turns a creature of pure intellect and of intense feeling it is not unnatural that he should give us separate and exclusive definitions of the function of art, one in terms of intellectual pleasure, the other in terms of the emotional realization of what he is pleased to call the infinite. And it is in keeping with the separateness of these definitions that, when thinking of literature as power, he should show a persistent tendency to ignore considerations of form or process, and that when considering literature as an activity rather than a product, he should dismiss content altogether, except as a material of indifferent value, or—as in his theory of rhetoric—expressly relax the requirements as to the truth of content. It is significant, moreover, that his passages on the literature of power, while partaking in some measure of the characteristics of rhetoric (of its preoccupation with precise distinctions, for example), should themselves be specimens of the literature of power; and that such essays as "Style" and "Rhetoric," in which he is concerned with the process of literature, should themselves be specimens of rhetoric. The "Rhetoric" in particular exemplifies the requirement of his definition that rhetoric must rest on artificial aids; truly, there is nothing in it which appeals to emotional comprehension.

It would be unfortunate to take leave of De Quincey's theory of literature on a note of mere explanation of its failure to form a consistent whole. There are certain elements of the conflict in his ideas rich in suggestions for speculation by the critic of today. It is possible to construct a unified theory by combining certain features of his theory of rhetoric and his theory of power.

The distinction between absolute truth and that which is plausible is less real for men today than it was in De Quincey's time, if indeed it has not broken down altogether. In so far as it persists, it is likely to take the form of an opposition between scientifically verifiable fact on the one hand and nonscientific fact or hypothesis on the other. Literature may be said to deal only with the latter.

Max Eastman, in *The Literary Mind*,⁵³ develops the thesis that the domain of literature has been diminishing through the ages, since the literary mind, in his view, has the right to exercise itself only on material which cannot be dealt with successfully by science. The distinction he draws between the domain of scientific knowledge and that of literature is parallel to De Quincey's distinction between the provinces of the literature of knowledge and rhetoric respectively. All that for De Quincey was comprised under power has been subsumed either under science or under rhetoric.

If we possess the rather simple confidence in science that Max Eastman does, the importance of literature would seem to have diminished; if we do not, it has probably increased. In either event, the domain of rhetoric, as the field within which certain and complete knowledge is not attainable, and in which therefore we are free to experiment with the manipulation of effects, has been expanded to subsume all literary truth. It cannot be held, indeed, that rhetoric, conceived of as extended in this way, exists for the purpose of merely beautiful mind play. Art for art's sake is an unpopular conception in our day; critics of most schools agree that literature is to be valued for its effects upon life, or upon the experience of living. But the play of the mind

⁵³ New York, 1932.

upon experience, whether for the purpose of practical persuasion, as for the Marxists, or for the more harmonious organization of the impulses of the individual, as for I. A. Richards and those of his school, may indeed be taken as the essential feature of literature. And such thought play may be analyzed in terms of its resolution of a conflict between necessity and freedom. The necessity laid upon literature is that it shall faithfully represent the truth, or elements of the truth, to the full degree to which truth is ascertainable; literature's freedom consists in the opportunity to fulfill its task in the most varied and strikingly effective ways possible and in the license to experiment with effects precisely for the sake of bringing new combinations of thought and feeling ("sleeping modes of feeling") into clear existence so that they may be judged by their effects upon life and living. Much of literature, as has already been suggested, may be regarded as a form of experimental statement. The question of the kind or degree of belief to be extended to its hypothetical representations is probably the most vital issue in modern criticism.⁵⁴

De Quincey confined the development of what may be described as tentative or occasional beliefs (beliefs induced for a particular occasion or type of occasion) to the field of rhetoric, within which the writer takes something of a holiday from the responsibilities that rest upon him in eloquence, poetry, and science. But beliefs of this kind cannot be so segregated, or limited to the purely intellectual—there is a manipulation of states of mind as of pure ideas. And thus we may say that if the factors of De Quincey's thought are themselves made the object of free selection and manipulation, they are useful in leading us, if not to advances in theory, then at least to a fresh perspective upon theory that is already current. Most contemporary theory

⁵⁴ Thus Richards and his followers distinguish sharply between scientific and emotive beliefs, and assign to the latter a validity based solely on the success of the responses induced in the nervous system. The terms "knowledge" and "power" might well be used to describe the effects of the two types of beliefs, but power is for these critics altogether different in its rationale from what it is for De Quincey.

is prevailingly psychological; it views literature as a process or experience. And it is ultimately as a psychological critic that we value De Quincey. The concept of mind play is a psychological one, and so likewise are his finest pronouncements on power. It is his definition of power in terms of the arousal of latent states of consciousness (1823), and not the definition in terms of ultimate truth and fixed values (1848), that speaks most congenially to the modern mind. The idea of actualizing sleeping modes of consciousness, disjoined from concepts of absolute truth and value, forms a suggestive synthesis with the idea of mind play enlarged to include feeling and charged with the task of serving the varied interests of life. This synthesis, moreover, can be achieved without benefit of a speculative metaphysics—a desideratum that is important in view of the fact that it is in psychological rather than metaphysical understanding that the advances of our day have been made.

CHAPTER VII

Summary and Conclusions

THE principal results of our analysis of De Quincey's theory of literature have been brought together and interpreted in sections II and III of the last chapter. The object here is only to summarize briefly in sequence the main conclusions arrived at in the several chapters.

The great philosophical influence in De Quincey's life was the philosophy of Kant, although that philosophy was responsible for a profound shock to his feelings and a permanent check to his early philosophical aspirations. Not capable of adjusting his emotions to the basic tenets of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, De Quincey was yet unable to refute the Kantian position or to push beyond it to the acceptance of a speculative metaphysic. His mind demanded absolute lucidity and rigorous logic in philosophy, and, being unwillingly persuaded by Kant that speculative knowledge of the real world is impossible, he took refuge not in the intellectual mysticism of the romantic philosophers but in an instinctive religious or moral mysticism. He thus contrived to obtain the benefit of conclusions similar to those of romantic philosophy without subscribing to that philosophy as a speculative system.

It is, therefore, upon a body of felt convictions rather than upon a metaphysics in the strict sense of the word that his philosophy of literature and art is based. As a moral mystic, De Quincey redefined truth so that it became, in all high matters, an affair of emotional realization. Knowledge of reality (the moral infinite) is given by the understanding

heart, man's true intelligence. Christianity reveals to the understanding heart the idea of sin, and life itself educates the heart by suffering and strife. Through sin and suffering alone is the infinite adequately revealed to man.

De Quincey distinguishes between three specific aesthetic effects. The picturesque he defines as the "characteresque." The beautiful he conceives of as the lovely and the shapely, which fascinate the eye without question of a distinct purpose. The sublime is the effect of the unimaginably great, and it exalts the soul through the intuitions which it gives of the moral infinite. It is the most important of the three effects in De Quincey's thought, and he recognizes such various species as the moral, the moral-physical, and the dark. His notion of the dark (the mysterious and dread) sublime is the most original aspect of his conception.

De Quincey views the principle of *idem in alio*—the representation of a subject in a nonliteral medium or manner—as the basic principle of the fine arts. But his discussion of this principle is ambiguous in its implications and his scattered comments on the nature and function of the arts are informed by two very different theories: by the theory that the object of the arts is intellectual pleasure, pleasure derived from the beautiful manipulation of materials, and by the theory that the object of the arts is power. Although on one occasion he speaks of power as being incarnated in pleasure, and although his remarks about music hint at a synthesis of the functions of power and pleasure, there is a fundamental dualism and inconsistency in his view.

De Quincey divides all that deserves the name of literature (all writing or public speech that rises above personal, local, or technical interests to some general interest of man) into the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. The literature of knowledge communicates that kind of truth which is apprehended by the discursive intellect; the literature of power, which is literature proper, or literature as a fine art, communicates deep sympathy with the higher truths of the moral infinite as apprehended by the understanding heart. Literature, then, as a fine art, is a mode of

arousing an excited awareness of the most important truths of man's being, many of which are only dimly realized apart from its influence.

De Quincey's bifurcation of the field of letters into the literature of knowledge and the literature of power represents a more definite extension into the field of prose than had been made before of the principle of distinction between the unpoetical and the poetical, though De Quincey can be credited with little more than applying and promulgating the conceptions of Wordsworth and Coleridge. He acknowledges his indebtedness to Wordsworth for the idea of the antithesis between knowledge and power.

What is most original in De Quincey's descriptions of power is the psychological approach and emphasis, rather than the ethical. De Quincey was obsessed by a sense of the infinite variety and complexity of human experience, and his idea of the moral infinite receives its specific content from this obsession.

De Quincey is primarily concerned, in his theory of literature as power, with final effects, and gives little attention to the creative process or faculty. In several contexts, however, he differentiates between genius and talent. Talent is general intellectual power, and is never unique. Genius is intellectual power which rests upon a capacity for deep feeling, and is always unique. Genius is an expression of the human mind acting as a unity, the intellect and the feelings moving in harmony and interacting with each other. Though it is neither adequate nor particularly original, this conception is one that accords with his analysis of power. And it may be said that through such theory De Quincey assisted in the diffusion among English readers of the idea of a vital distinction between genius and talent.

De Quincey contributes nothing to the theory of the imagination, and his references to that faculty are few. He recognizes as of great philosophical importance the distinction (which he attributes to Wordsworth) between the imagination and the fancy, yet is not always careful to preserve it in his own thought. His conception of the imagination appears

to parallel that of Wordsworth; it is unlikely that he followed Coleridge in acceptance of a comprehensive metaphysical theory of the faculty.

De Quincey's distinctions between various modes and levels of power constitute one of the most interesting parts of his literary theory, and exhibit a considerable grasp of the principle of organic connection between a mode of literature and the society or age that produces it. Thus he distinguishes between "the literature of the elementary affections" and "the literature of manner" and relates these types to the idea of a developing society which becomes progressively more interested in the refinements of social intercourse. He emphasizes the principle that every mode and species of literature must be judged by its own laws.

De Quincey viewed pagan and Christian literature as constituting two completely distinct modes of power, the sublimity of the Christian mode being based on the intuition of the infinities of moral experience given by the revelation through Christianity of the idea of sin. Greek literature is in general informed by the spirit of death; Christian literature, by the spirit of life. The forms of each literature, particularly the forms of the tragic drama, are determined by these modes of power.

De Quincey's views on style are characterized by the same paradox we discovered in his general aesthetic. He views style as a fine art in itself, which ministers to intellectual pleasure; it is beautiful and valuable apart from the interest of the ideas it conveys. Yet he also defines it as being, in "subjective" literature (a category not coterminous with the literature of power), the very incarnation of thought, a thing forever inseparable from thought.

De Quincey is commonly given credit for a wider and more philosophical application of the principle of style as the incarnation of thought than the one which he actually makes. The idea of the confluence of style and thought is, in any event, not original with him. It is another of the ideas which he takes from Wordsworth and for which he generously acknowledges his indebtedness.

Except for a small group of authors, De Quincey fails to recognize more than very partially the principle of connection between a writer's personality and his style. He tends in general to think not in terms of style as the unique expression of a writer's individuality of being and of his peculiar mode of power, but in terms of certain kinds or varieties of style each one of which is valuable for a particular purpose or kind of matter. In short, he fails on the whole to extend the organic principle which he recognizes as applying to literature in relation to its period and nationality, to the relationship between style and the individual writer.

It is in De Quincey's theory of rhetoric that we find the fullest illustration of his conception of aesthetic pleasure as consisting in the beautiful manipulation of the artist's materials. Rhetoric, for De Quincey, is not the practical art of persuasion, but a fine art of mind play. It is purely intellectual, any appeal to the feelings being excluded; it is amoral, not being concerned with full and sure truth; its interest is in itself as an activity; style and the arts of ornament serve in it a purely ministerial function—although De Quincey is not consistent on this point. Pure rhetoric is concerned with the communication neither of power nor of knowledge; it is the art which ministers to the mind's delight in hanging upon its own thoughts, playing with them, pursuing them through a maze of changes.

It is the opinion of the writer that, granting the perversity of this conception of rhetoric if considered as an account of the whole truth or even of a distinct species of literature, De Quincey's view serves to call our attention to an impulse of the mind that is almost universal and which it is important to recognize as a factor in human thinking and literary expression. The "Rhetoric" is more than a brilliant specimen of the kind of literature it describes; it is an important though one-sided exposition of a theory of real significance, and it must be regarded as De Quincey's most original contribution to criticism. It serves, furthermore, to explain the character of his own critical work, in so far as that work is not to be described as a criticism of power.

For De Quincey's interest in critical analysis is often rhetorical in character, and, even when it is not, the form of his work is to a large extent determined by the habits of composition which are the weakness of the rhetorician.

What is peculiar in De Quincey's thought on literature is not that he accepts both pleasure and power as objects of literature, but that in different places he asserts the exclusive claim of each function. This paradox in his thought is rooted in the fact that, in spite of his famous enunciation of the principle of style as the incarnation of thought, he does not contrive to bring form or style or the process of artistic manipulation into an effective synthesis with substance or meaning.

Because De Quincey stopped short of accepting the doctrine of romantic metaphysics he was left without a philosophical basis upon which to build an interpretation of the beautiful either in art or in nature as an expression of the real. The beautiful therefore remains more or less detached in his thought from the idea of truth. Moreover, the two-sidedness of his own mentality—the fact that he was both a creature of pure intellect and one of intense religious feeling—may be said in some measure to explain his rival conceptions of art as a source of intellectual pleasure and as a vehicle of sublime truth.

Appendix

ADDENDA, AND A COMMENT ON DE QUINCEY'S RELATION TO GERMAN LITERATURE

I

THE manuscript for this work was completed some six years ago. Since that time a number of books and articles on De Quincey have been published. Several others had appeared too recently to reach Dr. Proctor's hands or had arrived too late to receive more than passing notice. It has seemed appropriate to the editors that some mention should be made of these writings, especially of those which have a bearing on the present study in the way either of fresh information or of emphasis on problems that Dr. Proctor might himself have wished to touch upon before submitting his book to the public.

The amount of writing on De Quincey in the period in question—roughly since 1935—has been so great as to suggest something of a renaissance of interest in the life and work of this strange man as a subject for literary investigation. Outstanding among these publications have been the full-length critical biographies of Professor Eaton¹ and of Sackville-West,² both of 1936. Also to 1936 belong Bonner's *De Quincey at Work*³ and Sehrt's *Geschichtliches und religiöses Denkere bei Thomas De Quincey*.⁴ Mr. M. El-

¹ Horace A. Eaton, *Thomas De Quincey; A Biography* (New York, 1936).

² Sackville-West, Edward, *A Flame in Sunlight; the Life and Work of Thomas De Quincey* (London, 1936).

³ *De Quincey at Work: As Seen in One Hundred Thirty New and Newly Edited Letters*, collected and edited by Willard H. Bonner (Buffalo, 1936).

⁴ E. T. Sehrt, *Geschichtliches und religiöses Denkere bei Thomas De Quincey* (Berlin, 1936).

win's short biography⁵ had appeared slightly before these books, in 1935, and John Calvin Metcalf's *Portrait*,⁶ the last work on the subject to occupy a volume, followed in 1940. These longer studies have been supplemented by numerous articles, notes, and reviews,⁷ which, altogether, have probably served to focus more attention upon the name of De Quincey in the last half-dozen years than it has enjoyed in any similar period since the author's death in 1859.

None of these studies is primarily concerned with De Quincey's aesthetics, but several of them either contain explicit discussion of the subject or furnish material that throws more or less light on it. Professor Eaton and Sackville-West have the most to say about De Quincey as a theoretical critic. Mr. Eaton, although habitually charitable toward De Quincey, is on this matter inclined to be rather

⁵ M. Elwin, *De Quincey*, in "Great Lives" (London, 1935).

⁶ John Calvin Metcalf, *De Quincey: A Portrait* (Cambridge, 1940).

⁷ Many of these shorter works contain no reference to critical ideas, and are mentioned here merely to suggest something of the recent interest in De Quincey. Others, however, have direct bearing on our subject, and will be briefly discussed in succeeding pages. A partial list follows: Ford K. Brown, reviews of Sackville-West's *Flame in Sunlight* and of Eaton's *Thomas De Quincey* in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, XIII (1937), 200-203, 300-303; Anon., "De Quincey on French Drama," *More Books*, XIV (1939), 347-352; Honor McCusker, "De Quincey and the Landlord," *More Books*, XIV (1939), 66; William Clyde De Vane, "Experienced Fugitive," *The Yale Review*, XXVI (1937), 607-609; Kenneth Forward, "Libellous Attack on De Quincey," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, LII (1937), 244-260, and "Cessio Bonorum," *ibid.*, LIV (1939), 511-525; H. K. Galinski, "Is Thomas De Quincey the Author of 'The Love Charm'?" *Modern Language Notes*, LII (1937), 389-394; Randolph Hughes, "Vers la contrée du rêve: Balzac, Gautier, et Baudelaire, disciples de De Quincey," *Mercure de France*, CCXCIII (1939), 545-593; Claude E. Jones, "Some De Quincey Manuscripts," *A Journal of English Literary History*, VIII (1941), 216-226; R. W. King, "H. A. Eaton's *Thomas De Quincey: A Biography*," *Modern Language Notes*, LII (1937), 452-453; V. R., "De Quincey: Some Objections and Corrections," *Notes and Queries*, CLXXVI (1939), 417-418; *ibid.*, CLXXVII (1939), 3-6, 42-45, 189-191; *ibid.*, CLXXIX (1940), 204-207, 417-420, 434-436; Edward Sackville-West, "De Quincey: the Facts," *The Spectator*, CLVII (Aug. 21, 1936), 316-317; Philip Van Doren Stern, "Thomas De Quincey," *Saturday Review of Literature*, July 24, 1937, pp. 3-4, 14; Mark Van Doren, "Much about a Little Man," *The Nation*, CXLII (1936), 820; John E. Wells, "Wordsworth and De Quincey in Westminsterland Politics, 1818," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, LV (1940), 1080-1128; Metcalf, "De Quincey's Critical Years," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, XV (1940), 24-34.

severe. On the question of whether De Quincey had ever formulated a systematic aesthetic this biographer is dubious; if he had such a theory it is certain that he never communicated it to his public: "It is impossible to believe that a man of De Quincey's type of mind did not have a body of critical principles carefully thought out. But he never gave it to the world; and one can only deduce it from his writings at large."⁸ We know that De Quincey once attributed the absence of sound philosophical criticism in modern times to the fact that an adequate psychology is lacking. "In the sense of absolute and philosophical criticism, we have little or none; for before *that* can exist, we must have a good psychology, whereas at present we have none at all."⁹ Quoting this statement, Eaton suggests that it was not lack of a psychology but a lack of vital interest in literary criticism for its own sake that accounted for De Quincey's failure to "persist strenuously in philosophical reflection upon it."¹⁰

Professor Eaton does not accuse De Quincey of having no standards, but only of limiting himself to strictly individual ones which he used in quite cavalier fashion in his judgments on literature. His method was that of the eighteenth-century dogmatists; his principles were his own:

His method of applying his private doctrines was to expound or to judge. It was thus that he could make such sweeping generalizations as to classic and French literatures. He belongs with the dogmatists of the eighteenth century rather than with the philosophical, interpretative, or historical critics of the nineteenth. His standards of criticism were not those of Addison or Johnson, for they were his own and personal; but he used his principles with all their vigour and ruthlessness. In his better moments he turned to the analytic and concrete . . . and in such passages as that in which he examines Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* or the *Satires* he is admirable. Yet he has left us so little of this sort that he has not established himself among the important literary critics.¹¹

⁸ Eaton, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁹ "On Wordsworth's Poetry," XI, 294.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 278.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-278. In more detail Eaton remarks: "Even within his romantic prepossessions, De Quincey might have done substantive service to criticism, had he applied his full powers to the English poets and the problems presented by their practice. But he never rose to his opportunities. Perhaps

Eaton's position in brief is that, though De Quincey was endowed with the gifts and the taste to have made him a distinguished critic and an illuminating expositor of the mysteries underlying the literary art, he failed the mark of his high calling. He failed in part through lack of a compelling interest in philosophical aesthetics, in part through a tendency to sporadic and unsystematic application.

Sackville-West shows a more favorable attitude toward De Quincey's literary ideas. Indeed, almost more definitely than any one else, except Dr. Proctor himself, he professes to find a unity in De Quincey's aesthetic. Like Dr. Proctor, too, he discovers the grounds for this view in the important essays "Rhetoric," "Style," and "Language," regarding De Quincey's theory of rhetoric, especially, "as part and parcel of his general theory."¹²

Unfortunately, this critic does not go far in elucidating and sustaining his conclusion. His total direct discussion of De Quincey's theory is limited to something less than seven pages. In this small compass, however, he finds space to quote some of De Quincey's crucial passages and to define briefly what may be regarded as basic tenets in his theory. De Quincey's conception of the function of literature is that the primary work of the literary artist is to give light to what is obscure or to renew in the mind of the reader or observer a full apprehension of subjects to which his sensibilities have grown dormant.¹³ His emphasis is always on the subjective, specifically on "what is internal and individual to the sensibilities."¹⁴ The function of style is to embody

he came nearest to doing so in his essay *On Wordsworth's Poetry*, written in 1845. But even in this he is again casual, beginning by criticising adversely on psychologic grounds the story of Margaret at the opening of *The Excursion* and ending by the enumeration and illustration of some of Wordsworth's great contributions through his close observation, happy phrasing, and penetrative imagination. Then, in a postscript, De Quincey lightly touches upon Wordsworth's inadequate theory of poetic language. That is all. Of other contemporaries he says little . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 277).

¹² *A Flame in Sunlight*, pp. 324, 327.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁴ De Quincey, "Style," X, 229.

thoughts, not to serve as a separate ornament. It is at its best when, operating as an agent of the deeper sensibilities, it manifests itself in expression in which "manner" has become "confluent with matter." As such, "it is a product of art the rarest, subtlest, and most intellectual; and . . . it is then finest when it is most eminently disinterested."¹⁵ Its product is "intellectual pleasure," persuasion not conviction, the brightening of intelligibility and the enlightening of the understanding, not the inculcation of any particular brand of truth. Since it has for its constant end to circulate into its subjects "the life-blood of sensibility," literary style is virtually synonymous with "*emotive* writing."¹⁶ In these ideas we have the crux of De Quincey's theory of style, which, reciprocally, is the axis about which he framed his theory of the literature of power.

In the thought of De Quincey, Sackville-West goes on to say, power is the distinguishing mark of great literary works and great literary periods. He conceives of "a constant oscillation, throughout the ages, between creative periods and those which assimilate and regurgitate what has been amassed." In ages of great literary creation there is a crystallization of groups of genius, which De Quincey in one place attributes—quite lamely—to "sympathy," but elsewhere explains as the result of a "sudden birth of some creative movement in society."¹⁷ In any event, the cultivation of style is engendered by a "subjective order of intellectual pursuits." The age of Pericles and the age of Shakespeare are cases in point. One special phase of the theory of power is noticed by Sackville-West in remarks on the passage in "Language" in which De Quincey denies to the Greeks the most abiding appeal to the human mind. De Quincey here fully acknowledges the beauty and brilliance of Greek literature, but affirms that because in Greece the pole of the mind which "points to the mysterious and spiritual . . . was starved and palsied," in favor of the intellectual, we must admit of the

¹⁵ De Quincey, "Language," X, 260.

¹⁶ Sackville-West, *A Flame in Sunlight*, p. 326.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

Greek that "on the deeper and more abiding nature of man he has no hold."¹⁸

De Quincey's practical criticism, like his theory, Sackville-West believes, was characterized by subjectivity; hence the oddity of emphasis and proportion, and the trivialities about the subject's personal life in some of his essays. Even at his best his method was criticism from within, a method which, says this biographer, he established once and for all in his essays on Lessing and Richter:

. . . It is again criticism from within. De Quincey explains the method and effects of his author by entering his mind and looking outwards upon the objects which he has described, so as to give back, if possible, the peculiar *taste* of the experience of the writer himself. This is the method of De Quincey's most successful interpretative ventures, of his essays on Lamb, Pope, Shakespeare, Bentley, Herodotus, Milton, Greek Tragedy. A typically romantic method, its virtues are obvious and are almost better observed in the literary criticism of Hazlitt than in De Quincey's own; the former possessed the harder mind and was less liable to the cardinal error of the "subjective" method, which consists in not keeping the eye firmly on the object.¹⁹

This, Sackville-West points out, is a type of criticism that works best where the critic has a sort of personal affinity with his subject. Thus, "if only because his subject did in fact so curiously resemble himself," De Quincey appreciated and revealed the astonishing genius of Richter, as not even Carlyle was able to do;²⁰ but when he used the same method in dealing with men like Goethe and Keats, with whom he had no innate sympathy, he failed most miserably.

One statement by Sackville-West has interest in connection with the findings of Randolph Hughes in his recent study of De Quincey's influence on nineteenth-century French writers. De Quincey, says Sackville-West, "was born too

¹⁸ Sackville-West, *A Flame in Sunlight*, p. 328.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

²⁰ *Ibid.* In his *Ueber den Einfluss Jean Paul Friedrich Richters auf Thomas De Quincey* (Hof, 1899), Friedrich Christoph points out striking parallels in the style, diction, and ideas of Richter and De Quincey. De Quincey, this author believes, learned much from Jean Paul, and he goes so far as to say that a great part of that which appears original in De Quincey may be traced to the strong influence of the German writer.

early to have been contaminated by the paralyzing doctrine of art-for-art's-sake, which was later responsible for a whole series of works which exist in complete isolation from life De Quincey knew better than to indulge in so insane a divorce."²¹ M. Hughes, in the study mentioned, argues convincingly that the poetry of both Gautier and Baudelaire owed much to De Quincey.²² Gautier, he maintains, borrowed both superficially and more fundamentally from the English writer. And Baudelaire was all his life increasingly under the influence of De Quincey; indeed, it was from De Quincey that Baudelaire derived his chief inspiration, and it was to him that he had constantly to return for renewal of his powers of invention. Balzac's appropriations from De Quincey in various works amount to simple plagiarism. Hughes concludes that the influence of De Quincey on French literature has continued, even up to the Surréalistes; it has been far greater, indeed, than his influence on English literature. Now Gautier and Baudelaire were leaders of the French art-for-art's-sake movement. If Hughes is right it would appear that De Quincey was a considerable influence in the development of a poetic school with whose doctrine, according to Sackville-West, he would have had no traffic.

We are here, apparently, in the presence of either paradox or error. There is a little of both, perhaps, but there is more of paradox. The seasoning of error lies in Mr. Sackville-West's overlooking a rather important element in De Quincey's theory—developed especially in his "Rhetoric"—which Dr. Proctor has called "mind play." Now this phenomenon of mind play is essentially a species of art for art's sake: it has no regard for truth whatever; it simply takes a position and sets out to present it in the strongest possible light; it works around its point, embellishes it, varies it, seeks to delight and to dazzle, to win its way by artful style—but it is totally unmindful of moral value. There is basis here certainly for the most pronounced doctrine of divorcement of literature from life.

²¹ *A Flame in Sunlight*, p. 332.

²² *Op. cit.*

But, on the other hand, Sackville-West has right on his side when he declares that De Quincey held views contrary to the idea of art for art's sake: the point is that, as was so often the case with De Quincey, they were not the only views he held, nor did he, apparently, hold them all the time. De Quincey wrote much that reveals a moral bias. In his revolt against Kant it was moral judgment that triumphed: Kant's metaphysic he found was wholly intellectual, devoid of practical implications; and it was antireligious. The passages Sackville-West quotes in support of his statement that De Quincey would never indulge an insane divorce of art from life show that De Quincey believed that the function of literature is so to react upon the great interests of science, ethics, and philosophy as to "diffuse them, to popularize them, to protect them, and to root them."²³ Literature is not a mere embellishment of life; it is, rather, "one of its deep-sunk props."²⁴ They show, too, that he believed that everyone owes to impassioned books emotions that "mould him through life." And finally that, whereas all the knowledge in the world will not serve to raise you one step above the old level, "the very *first* step in power is a flight" toward a higher plane.²⁵

Recalling such passages and others that reflect sympathies with moral ends—which altogether rather overbalance the evidence for mind play—and, assuming that Mr. Hughes is correct in his conclusions for the effect of De Quincey on such art-for-art's-sake men as Baudelaire and Gautier, we are faced with a paradox of a not uncommon type in literature: namely, the exercise of chief influence in a direction contrary to the prevailing trend of a writer's main intention and thought. Pater and Keats may be cited as similar instances of this paradox. Both of these important writers, partly because of catch phrases, partly because of evidence of interest in beauty and style, have been regarded as models for later writers who found their satisfaction in artistic form or emo-

²³ De Quincey, "Glance at the Works of Mackintosh," VIII, 142.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Idem*, "The Poetry of Pope," XI, 56.

tion for emotion's sake. Thus Keats has been represented by Louise Rosenblatt²⁶ as the chief begetter of the art-for-art's-sake movement in England, and Pater has been habitually looked upon as the main impulse of the aesthetic school in late nineteenth-century England, and was, no doubt, especially through the postscript to *The Renaissance*, a genuine influence in its development. Yet neither of these writers was in his work as a whole either exponent or exemplification of an art primarily concerned with form or emotion divorced from life. It has been amply demonstrated that Keats's ideal was a poetry of character and sentiment which reflected human truth in its deepest aspects; and, as Dr. Child in particular has shown, Pater's literary theory, viewed in its entirety, places a high value on content, and supports an art of universal moral import.²⁷ If De Quincey, too, especially in France, has proved to be a chief influence on his less substantial side, the fact must be counted as another of the little ironies with which the history of literature and of ideas in general is conspicuously marked.

Since J. H. Stirling, many years ago, called De Quincey to account for his inability to understand Kant and the consequent inadequacy of his criticism of the German philosopher,²⁸ no one has offered a more vigorous indictment of De Quincey than the recent writer in *Notes and Queries* who signs himself "V. R."²⁹ The charge made is that De Quincey is notoriously inaccurate in his statements and quotations, that he is prejudiced in his attitudes, in cases even malicious, that he appears incapable of judging poetry, that he sometimes shows complete ignorance and lack of understanding of his subject, and that his critical-biographical articles, espe-

²⁶ *L'Idée de l'art pour l'art dans la littérature anglaise pendant la période victorienne* (Paris, "Bibliothèque de la Revue de littérature comparée," LXX [1931]).

²⁷ Ruth C. Child, *The Aesthetic of Walter Pater* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940).

²⁸ James Hutchison Stirling, "De Quincey and Coleridge upon Kant," in *Jerrold, Tennyson and Macaulay, with Other Critical Essays* (Edinburgh, 1868), pp. 172-224.

²⁹ V. R., "De Quincey: Some Objections and Corrections," as cited in note 7.

cially, fall far below his own promises and the reasonable expectations of his readers.

In spite of what Masson says of De Quincey's painstaking attention to little things, amounting, Masson declares, to "a passion for scientific exactness," V. R. is struck with a prevailing "inaccuracy in fact and quotation which exceeds the bad record in that way of any author I have ever studied."³⁰ De Quincey's "preternaturally tenacious memory," seems, in fact, to have "led to amazing forgetfulness." He continually violates his own criterion that "excessive carelessness and inattention" are "faults that tell powerfully for mischief."³¹ He has an "unpleasant way of relying on gossip and believing rumours that he cannot prove." And V. R. cites as an example of inaccuracy—in this case of malice—De Quincey's suggestion that Doctor Gilman was lured by Coleridge to take up the opium habit.³² Again, V. R. points out, De Quincey retells the story of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and falls into the grossest errors—some seven or eight important ones are enumerated—thereby doing Godwin and the reader an injustice by rendering the plot more commonplace and the meaning less significant.³³ Disliking Addison for his Whig politics, De Quincey devotes two pages to Addison's addiction to drink, and permits himself, in addition to minor falsities, the astonishing pronouncement that "Addison has never in one instance quoted or made any reference to Shakespeare."³⁴ So with Milton: De Quincey not only misquotes him but makes inaccurate factual statements about his work.

De Quincey contributed to the *Britannica* biographical sketches of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller. All of these illustrate his faults of inaccuracy and the omission of significant matters. In a rather pretentious introductory letter to the Shakespeare article, De Quincey declares "that no one question has been neglected which I ever heard of in connexion with Shakespeare's name; and I fear no rigour of ex-

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, CLXXVI, 417.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 418.

³³ *Ibid.*, CLXXVII, 3-4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43. V. R. appears to be quoting from memory. De Quincey's actual words were "that hardly twice throughout the 'Spectator' is Shakspeare quoted or alluded to by Addison" ("On Addison," XI, 19 n.).

amination, notwithstanding I have had no books to assist me but the two volumes lent me by yourself."³⁵ The facts are, however, the "problems" of Shakespeare are mostly ignored: there is no word of the vexed question of the sonnets, or of the long early poems, or of the influence of Marlowe, or of the "claims of the first folio," no mention of the problem of the learning of Shakespeare, no attempt to put Shakespeare's plays in their contemporary setting.³⁶

V. R. admits that "De Quincey was one of the pioneers in introducing a knowledge of German literature."³⁷ But he hastens to add that any expectations of finding full information on this subject or adequate expression as to the merits of German writers are doomed to disappointment. The *Britannica* articles on Schiller and Goethe are "grossly deficient, and in the case of Goethe, crudely malicious." The gross inadequacy of the account of Schiller is illustrated by the fact that *Wilhelm Tell* is not mentioned, nor *The Bride of Messina*, nor the *History of the Thirty Years War*; and there is no word of Schiller's other histories, nothing of the essays, the poems, or the ballads. The treatment of Jean Paul is in contrast fair and adequate, V. R. finding himself in agreement with other critics on De Quincey's unquestioned ability to understand and interpret this particular German.³⁸

V. R. has time for a word, too, about De Quincey's general hostility toward French literature, which he regards as indicative of a circumscribed and perverted critical attitude. Citing De Quincey's dictum that French literature is "now in the last stage of phthisis—dotage, palsy, or whatever image will best express the most abject state of senility,"³⁹ he proceeds to use this statement as a text for a most damaging censure. "But no man of any judgment [he declares] will indict the

³⁵ De Quincey, "Shakspeare," IV, 17 n.

³⁶ V. R., *op. cit.*, CLXXVII, 4. It is only fair to set down here the contrasting statement of De Quincey's most recent biographer: "As a biographical essayist, he brought subtle analysis to bear on the accumulated knowledge of his subject, and his imaginative sympathy inspired constructive criticism singularly deft and convincing" (Metcalf, *De Quincey: A Portrait*, p. 128).

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, CLXXVII, 189.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190.

³⁹ "John Paul Frederick Richter," XI, 260.

literature of a whole nation as he does. He loses all sense of proportion and reasonable language when he starts on anything he dislikes. He may contradict what he has said elsewhere, but that does not matter. He is not troubled about the virtue of consistency and he is enjoying the pleasure of disparagement."⁴⁰

In his analysis of De Quincey on his weaker sides V. R. is no doubt often right, but he also sometimes appears a little querulous and unnecessarily severe. His harsh judgment of De Quincey's attitude toward French literature, in case, might have been somewhat mitigated had he seen the text of a number of fragmentary manuscripts lately printed in *More Books*.⁴¹

These manuscripts are in the form of a set of notes evidently made by De Quincey in preparation for an article on French drama and literature. They are of interest on three counts: first, for the light they shed on De Quincey's methods in working up his materials; second, for their critical view of French literature and particularly for evidences of a certain anxiety to judge the French productions with a more tolerant eye than was his wont; and third, for their implication of the desirability of a general reciprocity of interest and knowledge between literatures of different nations, with some suggestions for a fair way to evaluate a foreign author.

There are in all seven notes. The first, obviously intended for an introduction, and the sixth have no headings; the other five are labelled: "II. French Drama," "III. A Statement of Malesherbes," "IV. M. Guizot on Corneille and Shakespeare," "V. Coleridge and French Tragedy," "VII. Telemaque." So far as these notes are evidence, the essay would have consisted of a running discussion of French drama with a general estimate of the genre in French and a specific judgment of Fénelon's *Télémaque*, all interspersed with the side excursions resplendent with original speculations and

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, CLXXVII, 191.

⁴¹ "De Quincey on French Drama," *More Books*, XIV (1939), 347-352, a first printing with a running commentary by the editor (anonymous) of a set of manuscript notes dealing with French drama. From internal evidence it would appear that these notes belong to about the year 1852.

with the enlargements of ideas from others that we have learned to regard as characteristic of De Quincey's compositions. The article as a whole would, it must be confessed, have still been derogatory in tone, in keeping with De Quincey's habitual attitude. Yet it would have shown evidence of an effort toward an impartial approach to and a decent comprehension of French literature, a striving of head against heart as it were, indicative of an intellectual recognition at least of the claims of critical tolerance. And it would have contained a fair recipe for the practical application of the tolerant attitude toward the works of foreign authors.

Note II, headed "French Drama," is in part a confession of a critical principle to the effect that in judging a piece of literature we should accept it on its own grounds. Thus, however bad one may feel French drama to be, judged from the English point of view, if the right conditions are observed this drama does furnish the means to a certain pleasure:

. . . I am becoming convinced of one thing—viz., that to understand the French drama we must see it or rather hear it. I feel that a stately *soutenue* declamation almost professedly pompous and *cadencee* might give a *sui generis* pleasure—no more excluding a higher pleasure obtainable from rapid and impassioned movement, and no more able to dispute the supremacy of this last than an epigram. But an epigram will still be a *sui generis* composition.⁴²

The pleasure afforded by the declamatory compositions of the French dramatists will be intrinsically different from that afforded by the passion and movement of, say, Shakespeare; and De Quincey obviously feels that even when these compositions are received under conditions most favorable to themselves this pleasure will be of a lower order. Yet he is acknowledging that such literature has a power to give pleasure peculiar to itself, and, furthermore, that he is under obligation as a critic to take due cognizance of this fact.

It is true that the value of the French drama can be best appreciated by the Frenchman, who, in turn, conditioned as he is by his experience with Racine, cannot be expected to find satisfaction in Shakespeare: "A Frenchman with much

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 348.

candour in his mind sits down to read Shakespeare. He finds nothing in him of what he is seeking. How should he? He is seeking what is in Racine. Now this is incompatible with the very idea of Shakespeare."⁴³ And by implication, we may judge from what has preceded, it is incompatible with the principles of a right critical approach. For throughout this note De Quincey appears to be laying the groundwork for an important pronouncement for critical objectivity and reciprocity, and to be making the concession that for himself at least a proper appreciation of French drama is possible only when he can rid his mind of English preconceptions of a staccato, rapid-fire dialogue and come to the French theatre prepared for the peculiar, if limited, pleasure to be had from stately and pompous declamation. This is far from the narrow, biased attitude toward the French attributed to De Quincey by V. R.

It is probable that note V, labeled "Coleridge and French Tragedy," would have evolved into something like a support for the ideas contained in note II, though it is difficult to see just how the suggestions contained in this fragment could have materialized into unified exposition. The heads and subheads would appear to resolve themselves into some such outline as the following:

1. Coleridge's final conversion to Racine.
2. Charles Fox's obtuseness with regard to Shakespeare in contrast to his championship of Racine.

⁴³ "De Quincey on French Drama," *More Books*, XIV (1939), 348. Several years before De Quincey wrote this note George Henry Lewes had clearly stated the whole principle: "It seems impertinent to thrust forward the truism that the foreign poet wrote to *his* nation and for *his* time, and not all for ours . . . yet this truism is perpetually being neglected; the work of the foreign poet is always judged according to our tastes and our standards. For there is scarcely a critic who, judging of a Greek play, does not test it by the Shakespearean standard So also the critics speak of Racine, as if he were ridiculous for not being an Englishman. Yet the man who refuses to discard his national prejudices and standards, who refuses to regard the French poet with, as far as possible, the eyes of a Frenchman, had better, for the sake of honesty and criticism, relinquish the task altogether . . ." ("Augustus William Schlegel," *Foreign Quarterly Review*, XXXII [1843], 96). Lewes, it should be recalled, is himself commenting on a statement much to the same effect previously made by Schlegel. (I am indebted for this note to Mr. Morris Greenhut, who is making a study of the criticism of George Henry Lewes.)

3. The peril of the ignoring of any person ever the idol of his own people by any civilized dweller of another land.
 - a. To Charles Fox all Germans from Leibnitz down were non-entities.
 - b. By Frederick Schlegel Fox in turn was dismissed as one barely heard of.
 - e. Feeble a critic as was Fox, Schlegel could hardly be justified in his lack of appreciation of his fame: Fox would have been avenged could Schlegel have suspected how little he was known or read by Englishmen.

This would have all come to an argument, one may judge, for a proper curiosity about, and understanding of, the literature and writers of other nations. If so, it would fit into the pattern of note II in its suggestions for a tolerant and intelligent approach to a foreign literature. There is, moreover, in this manuscript one of De Quincey's happiest thoughts: namely, that no civilized dweller of another land can afford to ignore any one who has ever been held the idol of his own people. That is a principle that both historians and literary critics may well ponder. Reflection upon the idea, once it had come to him, may well have furnished De Quincey with the impulse for the projected essay on French literature, in which he would, at this late date, at least explain the difficulties that lay in the way of English appreciation of Gallic drama.

II

De Quincey's attitude toward German literature was, of course, always more cordial than toward the French. He read German at Oxford and afterwards periodically immersed himself in it with varying degrees of intensity; he at first found here a literature of power, like "a banner broad-unfurled," like a "sudden apocalypse," and full of "miraculous promise," he tells us; and in the same enthusiastic vein, "It seemed in those days an El Dorado as true and undeceiving as it was evidently inexhaustible."⁴⁴ Later he was to become one of the pioneers in introducing German literature into England.

It may be questioned whether this is the place to enter

⁴⁴ "Autobiography," II, 84-85.

upon a consideration, however brief, of the extent and value of De Quincey's services to German literature. The facts are, however, this problem seems to be perennial, and, as might be expected, it has been raised by some of the writers mentioned in this appendix, notably Professor Eaton and V. R. It is, moreover, a matter that has a bearing on the stature and importance of De Quincey as a literary man and critic, as Professor Eaton points out. Eaton feels that De Quincey missed a great opportunity:

. . . He knew German literature and philosophy; and the tremendous philosophical movement in the north of Europe which had been seething for more than a generation was crying out to be interpreted to the English public. De Quincey should have been the man to interpret it; to do what Coleridge and Carlyle in their vague ways were attempting. He now and then declared that he was intending to do just that. But he never did; else his position in the history of English thought in the nineteenth century would be much more important than it is.⁴⁶

A signal example of De Quincey's failure to measure up to his opportunities, Mr. Eaton finds, is furnished by his treatment of Kant: in view of the frequency with which De Quincey mentions Kant and the constancy with which the German philosopher is in his mind we might have expected him to make at least a serious attempt to expound his central theories; instead, for the most part, "he plays with Kant's minor works or unessential ideas."⁴⁶

One may agree with Professor Eaton in his main contention, I think, and still believe that the nineteenth century owed to De Quincey a large debt for his efforts to extend a knowledge of German literature. This is a fact that has not always been recognized. There have, indeed, been critics, greatly in the minority it appears, who have been inclined to overrate De Quincey's services. One of these was Hodgson, in whose opinion De Quincey was "foremost of those to whom our generation . . . owes its enjoyment of German literature."⁴⁷ Hodgson defends De Quincey as an interpreter of

⁴⁶ Eaton, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

⁴⁷ Eaton, *loc. cit.*

"Shadworth H. Hodgson, "On the Genius of De Quincey," in *De*

German writers and makes claims for his achievements which can hardly be substantiated. On the other hand, there have been those who regard De Quincey's influence in this field as negligible or who ignore it altogether. In this class belongs Leslie Stephen, who in his essay "The Importation of German,"⁴⁸ makes no mention whatever of De Quincey among those who helped make German literature known in England. It is true that in writing on De Quincey in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1871, Stephen briefly recognizes De Quincey's work on German authors but only to point out that his judgments on German metaphysics are little better than a "collection of contemptuous prejudices."⁴⁹ That, later, in his considered study of the introduction of German writers to the English he ignores De Quincey, suggests that he regarded his influence as unworthy of notice. Similarly, though, since the writer has no claim to adequate scholarship in his subject, not so strangely, there is no word of De Quincey in an article by a Mr. Perry purporting to discuss German influence in English literature printed in the *Atlantic* for August, 1877.⁵⁰ It is easier to understand why Alford, a few years later, should omit consideration of De Quincey as one of Goethe's early critics in England.⁵¹ For in spite of his temperate and fairly judicial attitude in the article on Goethe for the *Britannica*, De Quincey on the whole probably did more harm than good to Goethe's name in England. He

Quincey and His Friends, written and collected by James Hogg (London, 1895), p. 337.

⁴⁸ In *Studies of a Biographer* (Second Series) (London, 1902), II, 38-75.

⁴⁹ "De Quincey," *The Fortnightly Review*, IX (N. S.) (1871), 310-329. It should be noted that Stephen takes a somewhat more favorable view of the matter in his article on De Quincey in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, where he again recognizes De Quincey's work with German authors.

⁵⁰ Thomas Sergeant Perry, "German Influence in English Literature," *The Atlantic Monthly*, XL (1877), 129-147. There are not only wide gaps in this author's information—he does not even mention Thomas Taylor—but several inaccuracies in his statements.

⁵¹ R. G. Alford, "Goethe's Earliest Critics in England," in *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, Nos. 5-8 (1889-99). This was an address delivered before the Goethe Society in 1891, and appears in the *Publications* as No. 7 (1893). Alford's one notice of De Quincey is mention of the "rather spiteful review" of Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister* in the *London Magazine*, 1824.

had little liking for Goethe or his works, distrusting him on moral grounds and habitually placing him below Schiller as a literary artist.

A more notable instance of failure to recognize De Quincey is to be found in three articles by Max Batt, the first in 1902, the third in 1907.⁵² The first two of these are more particular studies of the efforts of Robert Pearce Gillies in popularizing German works and authors.⁵³ But the third professes to give the story of German literature in England "about 1826." This account records something of the activities in the German field not only of such important men as Carlyle and Thomas Taylor of Norwich, but of such minor figures as Richard Holcroft, George Soane, Thomas Rascoe, and R. P. Gillies, but not one word of De Quincey. This is the more remarkable in a "scholarly" article when we recall that much of De Quincey's best work on the German writers came in the precise period covered by Mr. Batt. Thus there were articles on Richter with translations of a score of his analects in the *London Magazine* for December, 1821, and for February and March, 1824; an article on Herder in the *London Magazine* for April, 1823; an essay on Lessing, with a translation, in *Blackwood's Magazine* for November, 1826, and for February, 1827, and articles on Kant and translations from his works in the *London Magazine* for April, May, and October, 1824, and for February, 1827; also in *Blackwood's* for August, 1830, and *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* for November, 1833, and for June, 1836. Other publications during this period included five considerable translations from the German in 1823 and 1824 and digests and free renderings of German works in January, February, March, June, and July,

⁵² Max Batt, "Contributions to the History of English Opinion of German Literature: Gillies and the *Foreign Quarterly Review*," *Modern Language Notes*, XVII (1902), 166-170; "Contributions to the History of English Opinion of German Literature: Gillies and *Blackwood's Magazine*," *Modern Language Notes*, XVIII (1903), 65-69; "The German Story in England about 1826," *Modern Philology*, V (1907), 169-179.

⁵³ Robert Pearce Gillies is now known chiefly through his not very exciting *Memoirs of a Literary Veteran*, in three volumes (London: Richard Bentley, 1851).

1824, and others in 1825 and 1828—all in addition to the unfortunate review of Carlyle's *Wilhelm Meister* in 1824 and the notorious "freely translated" *Walladmor* in two volumes, 1825. Of this rather prodigious activity Mr. Batt says no word.

The extent of the influence of De Quincey's numerous publications in disseminating a knowledge of and interest in German literature cannot be told with anything like accuracy. At best nothing is more difficult to determine than the matter of influence. The problem is, in this case, complicated first by the fact that De Quincey's influence in general has never been studied, and secondly by the circumstance that the effects of some of De Quincey's writings on the Germans must certainly have been negative: the long review of Carlyle's translation of *Wilhelm Meister*, for example, and certain passages in which he adjudged Kant's philosophy inimical to Christianity. Even so, the majority of De Quincey's publications on things German were offered in a spirit of approbation, and his translations and digests, especially, served to introduce his readers to the style and the ideas of writers of whom they had heard little or nothing. Most of his articles on the Germans were generously interlaced with translation, to the end of giving readers a chance to see for themselves what the new authors were like.

Considering the volume and wide distribution of his work, the presumption would be that De Quincey should be given serious consideration in any study purporting to show the relationships between German and English literature in the nineteenth century, Messrs. Stephen, Batt, Alford, and Perry notwithstanding.

The most thorough investigation of De Quincey as a critic of German literature has been made by Thomas A. Dunn.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *Thomas De Quincey's Relation to German Literature and Philosophy* (Strassburg, 1900). One would expect to find studies of this subject by German writers. There appears to be, however, nothing further than brief mention here and there, no thorough treatment. Christoph's thesis of De Quincey's debt to Jean Paul has been mentioned (p. 280, note 20), but this is a question of individual relationship between two authors. Ernst Margraf (*Einfluss der deutschen Litteratur auf die . . . englische am Ende des achtzehnten und*

Mr. Dunn clearly feels that as an interpreter of German belles lettres and philosophy De Quincey had the limitations of superficiality and prejudice. The superficiality of his criticism shows itself in an emphasis on manifestations rather than in a probing into the essential qualities of the German mind. His prejudice reveals itself in an insistence on judging German literature by purely English standards. He had a true and lasting interest in the literature, an extensive knowledge of works and authors, "but he had no feeling for its deepest motives, no sense for its reality."⁵⁵ He lacked insight into the moving impulses that lay behind *Wilhelm Meister* and which culminated in the *Faust*, and he failed to penetrate the essential core of speculation that constitutes the works of Kant.⁵⁶ Even so, Mr. Dunn gives De Quincey due credit, along with Carlyle, for helping rescue German literature from the prejudices that had placed it in discredit during the first two decades of the century.⁵⁷ And he offers an

im ersten Drittel des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts [Leipzig, 1901]), gives exactly two pages (38-39) to De Quincey, in a quite superficial repetition of the commonplaces to the effect that De Quincey wrote vitriolic things about Carlyle's *Wilhelm Meister*, that he considered *Werther* Goethe's greatest work, that in general he depreciated Goethe in favor of Schiller, and that his favorite German author was Jean Paul, by whom he was profoundly influenced. A similar, though even more limited, treatment of De Quincey in relation to German writers is to be found in Emil Koepfel's *Deutsche Strömungen in der englischen Literatur* (Strassburg, 1910). Herr Koepfel is able to dispose of De Quincey in one paragraph (p. 13), the sum of which is as follows: De Quincey was a critic of the Romantic period who followed the tendency of his kind to belittle Goethe and to exalt Schiller. The judgment on Goethe by this man ("who rose to fame through his revelation of the experiences of an opium eater, and who often expressed himself on the literature and philosophy of Germany") was that *Werther* was Goethe's best work, and that Goethe's present fame must sink to put him in his proper rank. Schiller on the contrary is praised by him as the greatest German writer, who as a man, also, has more right to high honors than any other author of modern Germany. After this paragraph on De Quincey there follow six pages on Carlyle, whose services to German literature win the approving comment: "A true friend to Germany was Carlyle."

We may conclude, I think, that we can get little help from the Germans in assessing De Quincey's services to their literature.

⁵⁵ Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 27 and elsewhere.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3. The names of Carlyle and De Quincey have been frequently coupled in discussions of Anglo-German literary relations. Dunn

imposing array of evidence of De Quincey's interest and activities in presenting German work and writers to his readers. His extensive bibliography shows a grand total of twenty-seven translations, reviews, digests, and biographical sketches introducing the names and works of such men as Richter, Herder, Kant, Tieck, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Hartmann, Voss, and Schlosser; nearly a score of quotations from these and other authors; allusions to some twenty-five German scholars; about thirty-five references and comments on German philosophers; and, scattered throughout his works, some thirty references to other German writers.

Assuming that De Quincey had even an average following among the contributors to the *London Magazine*, *Tait's*, *Blackwood's*, and the other periodicals to which he contributed, we cannot easily believe that his efforts to acquaint these readers with German literature went for nothing. He may

avoids placing either above the other as an interpreter of German literature. Most writers have given Carlyle the preference. One of these is Walter Y. Durand ("De Quincey and Carlyle in Their Relation to the Germans," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXII [1907], 521-530). Mr. Durand's conclusion is that De Quincey "falls far below Carlyle as a champion of Teutonism, both in the literary and the philosophic value of his contribution" and "in his direct translation from the German and . . . the indirect bringing over of German ideas and moods" (pp. 527-528). De Quincey's best criticisms were on Richter and Tieck. Here "one finds him a sympathetic critic, getting away from his own prejudices, giving a suggestive conception of his author and in some measure interpreting him to his reader" (p. 523). But in general Carlyle was superior in his full, intimate, and illuminating interpretations. De Quincey has the advantage of Carlyle in only one department: namely, in the translations and digests of a philosophical sort. And yet even here De Quincey's contribution is not of commanding importance. Too many of his choices, such as the *Toilette of the Hebrew Lady*, the *Philosophy of Herodotus*, the *Origin of the Rosicrucians*, were made on the basis of "his own rather pedantic and antiquarian taste," rather than for intrinsic worth. Durand calls attention to Leslie Stephen's negative view of De Quincey's work on Kant and other philosophers in his 1871 article in the *Fortnightly Review*, noting that in his later sketch in *The Dictionary of National Biography* Stephen is more charitable. And yet, Durand decides, Stephen came pretty close to the fact when he said of De Quincey's labors with German philosophers that "nothing ever came of all this." For "little has appeared in De Quincey's works to show for all the years of his devotion to German metaphysics; and, as I have said, the reason is that he failed to probe far enough to find in Kant that positively constructive element which his nature demanded" (Durand, *op. cit.*, p. 525).

have misunderstood the deeper significance of his authors, may have misjudged and underrated some of them—as he certainly did Goethe and Kant—but the mere impact of repeated reference and quotation and extended discussion of name after name, work after work, idea after idea from the wide field of German literature must in the long run have had an incalculable effect.

Yet we can also appreciate Professor Eaton's reproach that De Quincey "missed a great opportunity" to do a unique service to German and, hence, to world literature; and we can share his disappointment in the relative failure of one who, whatever he may have accomplished, might have done much more. No doubt De Quincey did fall short of his potential achievement, and specifically of the goal he set for himself, in interpreting German literature, just as one may say that he fell short in all other fields he entered—with the possible exception of style. In granting this, we should also hasten to admit that we are perhaps inclined to demand of De Quincey what was not in the man to give. De Quincey was philosophic, but he was not a philosopher. He may have been capable of systematic logical thought, but the evidence is against it. The truth we get from him is the kind that comes in flashes; if in some of its aspects it has a certain internal consistency this result may be attributed less to clearly wrought and sustained logical process than to a sort of artistic conviction periodically reasserting itself. De Quincey was first of all an artist; and as a critic he was an artist-critic and should be regarded as such, with whatever qualifications the term implies. Likewise, as a philosopher he was only an artist-philosopher. Such a man, I think, could hardly be expected to interpret to his countrymen the abstruse and difficult metaphysics of Kant. One may believe, indeed, that there is a little of the humbug of defense mechanism in his ingenuous explanation, when he undertook the partial task of making Kant better known through translation and digest, that he chose those writings which had to do with social and political questions on the ground that the practical English mind was not yet ready for an abstract metaphysics that had

no relation to the daily uses of life.⁵⁸ May we not believe that De Quincey had himself found the Kantian theory a bit too elusive for his own full grasp and shrank from committing himself to elucidating its mysteries? We know that in the end it was what he considered the moral implications of Kant's speculations, not their metaphysical worth, that bulked largest in his evaluation of them. It may be after all that his avoidance of any final and complete attempt to present and interpret Kant was a bit of intuitive wisdom on his part that he did well to heed.

Whatever the true state of things may be as between De Quincey and Kant, or whatever De Quincey should have done with German literature that he did not do, it still remains that De Quincey's is a name that cannot be passed over lightly in any consideration of Anglo-German literary relations. And one is inclined to agree with Dunn when he says that De Quincey with Carlyle did much to free German literature from the unfavorable attitudes with which the English public regarded it in the early years of the century.⁵⁹ It is even possible to argue that his work—in that it was more in the critical, less in the *idola* class than Carlyle's, and in that it came first, preparing the way, so to speak, for more extensive consideration later—has an importance exceeding that of Carlyle's own. In part because he was something of the hard-headed Englishman, De Quincey seems to have detected the sickly qualities of German emotionalism and the potentially vitiating elements of Kantian transcendentalism in a way that Carlyle did not. It is to be admitted that he struck false notes and fell into errors both of commission and omission. But let us recall that he was doing explorative work, dealing without the benefit of accumulated scholarship with authors known to him only in a foreign tongue, and our censure is softened. He dealt badly with Goethe, yes; but he did well by Jean Paul, so well, indeed, that the critics are agreed that his work on this writer stands with his best criticism. There was, of course, a reason for his doing well with Jean Paul:

⁵⁸ "Kant in His Miscellaneous Essays," VIII, 90.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

Jean Paul, too, was an artist like himself, with a temperament, a mind, a style much like his own. So that when he wrote of Richter he almost wrote of himself.⁶⁰ He wrote less successfully of Herder, and Lessing, and Schiller, but even of these and of many others he wrote well enough and extensively enough to give their names and the titles of their works the courtesy of an introduction to hundreds of readers to whom they might otherwise have remained quite unknown.

CLARENCE D. THORPE

⁶⁰ As Sackville-West has noted, *A Flame in Sunlight*, pp. 213-214.

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